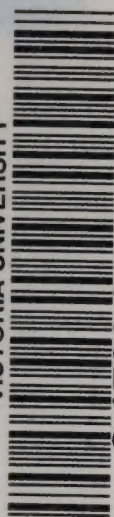


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THE JEWS AT THE CLOSE
OF THE BIBLE AGE

THE JEWS AT THE CLOSE OF THE BIBLE AGE

A course of Lectures delivered in 1924 at
the Jews' College, London, under the Auspices
of the Union of Jewish Literary Societies



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NOTE

THE Lecture by the late Canon Burney, included in this volume, is published by the kind permission of the Clarendon Press, Oxford, and of the Editor of "The Interpreter." The lecture, as here printed, together with additional matter, first appeared in "The Interpreter" and was subsequently included in a volume by the late Canon, entitled "Israel's Hope of Immortality," published by the Clarendon Press, which also contained a discussion of the Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic literature.

PREFACE

THE Chapters of this Volume comprise the four lectures of a course on "The Jews at the Close of the Bible Age," which were arranged by the Union of Jewish Literary Societies and delivered during the winter of 1924, at Jews' College, London. The annual series of public lectures form a distinctive feature of the work of the Union in cultivating and extending the knowledge of Jewish Literature and History. Large audiences enjoyed the advantage of hearing these lectures, but it is felt that a still larger public awaits with interest the opportunity of acquaintance with them in permanent form. Both the volume of the former session's course of lectures, "Judaism and the Beginnings of Christianity," and the present volume will, it is confidently believed, prove valued additions to the library of Jewish scholarship in the English language. The Council of the Union take this opportunity of expressing their gratitude to the lecturers who readily and generously allowed the Union to make

free use of their lectures for the purpose of publication. To one of the undersigned (L. H.) fell the task of organising this course of lectures ; to the other (B. B. B.), that of seeing them through the press.

BERTRAM B. BENAS,

President, 1923-5.

LIZZIE HANDS,

Hon. Secretary,

Union of Jewish Literary Societies.

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INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

BY

THE REV. A. COHEN, M.A., PH.D.

Minister, Birmingham Hebrew Congregation

THE JEWS AT THE CLOSE OF THE
BIBLE AGE

THE JEWS AT THE CLOSE OF THE BIBLE AGE

INTRODUCTORY

THE title chosen for this series of lectures raises an important and interesting problem, viz. : When did the Biblical Age come to a close ? If we have to discover the precise answer to that question before proceeding any further, I am afraid it will be impossible for us to make progress with our subject. The whole of the time allotted to me could be absorbed in its discussion. We should have to tread the thorny path of investigating when certain sections of the Hebrew Scriptures were written, and consider the vast divergence between the old and the new schools of Biblical scholarship. In a word, the validity of the Higher Criticism is involved.

For what is the problem ? I cannot do better than state it in the words used by the late Dr. Schechter, in his inaugural lecture as Goldsmid Professor of Hebrew at University College :¹ "Whilst Tradition knows too much of the earlier and earliest history of Israel, our modern schools are too prolific of their information as to the later history of Israel, that is the greater

¹ *Studies in Judaism.* 2nd Series, pp. 41 f.

part of what is known as the Persian-Greek period. You will at once realise this peculiar distribution of knowledge and ignorance, if you compare two chronological tables, the one appended to a Bible which appeared in 1866, and the other incorporated in the second volume of Kautzch's 'Die heilige Schrift,' published in 1894. The former is most complete in its record of events said to have taken place before 1088 B.C.E., and is almost one large blank after 450 B.C.E. In the latter the very opposite is the case, the blank being transferred to the first thousand years of Israel's history, whilst the Persian-Greek period teems with historical events and, in particular, with the chronology of the composition of various canonical writings. . . . Modern learning has thus, with its characteristic *horror vacui*, peopled these very centuries with law-givers, prophets, psalmists, and apocalypse writers ; but every student will, I think, readily admit that there is still many an obscure point to be cleared up. For instance, the exact number of the Maccabean Psalms, which is constantly shifting ; the exact date of the composition of the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is still a mere guess. . . . Altogether, the period looks to me rather over-populated."

So declared Professor Schechter ; and I am in hearty agreement with him. What has hitherto been the blank, or almost completely blank, chapter in Jewish history—viz., between the age of Ezra and Nehemiah (about 440 B.C.E.), and a century-and-a-half later when the Judeans came

under the sway of the Egyptian Ptolemies—has, during the last fifty years, been re-written to an extraordinary degree. It is now a decidedly crowded chapter in the newer histories of Israel. But what must make one hesitant to accept the material with which the modern historians have filled in the hiatus is that archaeology has not made a single discovery which illumines the darkness, so far as the Jews of the Holy Land in that age are concerned. No new facts have come to light from any external source which could add a single line to the blank pages. Instead we have theory and conjecture.

Professor Schechter truly said: "There is no period in Jewish history which is so entirely obscure as the period extending from about 450 to 150 B.C.E. All that is left us from those ages are a few meagre notices by Josephus, which do not seem to be above doubt, and a few bare names in the Books of Chronicles, of persons who hardly left any mark on the history of the times. One gets rather suspicious of a hypothesis with powers of vision which seem to grow in proportion to the increasing darkness surrounding an age. More light is wanted!"¹

Since those words were spoken, the first rays of dawn have begun to pierce the night of ignorance. The discovery has been made of a number of documents, written in Aramaic, which provide us with definite information about the colony of Jews resident in Egypt in the fifth century, i.e., in the time of Ezra. A lecture is to

¹Op. cit., p. 43.

be delivered in this course on this fascinating theme, and, therefore, I reluctantly pass it over. But this find of documents, belonging to an age removed from ours by 24 centuries, gives us hope that it may be succeeded by others which will help us to fill in the gaps in our past records with ascertained facts, not theories. Who can tell what a thorough exploration of Palestine may produce? Until such discoveries are made, I, for one, am satisfied to suspend my judgment.

We may assume, then, for the purpose of this lecture that the close of the Biblical Age is the latter half of the fifth century B.C.E., and the last historical events are to be found recorded in the books which bear the name of Ezra and Nehemiah. The study of the condition of the Jews at that period will be found most instructive, because the times were big with crisis and importance. All writers on Jewish history, to whichever school they belong, agree on this point. The famous critic, Professor Kuenen, states: "Unless we be mistaken, the position of Israel's religion about the middle of the fifth century was most critical. If no rescue came, the longer existence, or at least the future of [the religion] was doubtful."¹ Still more emphatic is the opinion expressed by Mr. R. T. Herford, in his book on "Pharisaism," in which he says: "Till Ezra came, the Jews did hardly more than mark time, if, indeed, they were not gradually losing ground. If Ezra had not come, it is conceivable,

¹ *Religion of Israel*, ii. 218.

and indeed highly probable, that Judaism would have disappeared altogether.”¹ This view was evidently shared by the Rabbis; for in the Talmud² we find one of them declaring: “When the Torah was forgotten, Ezra came up from Babylon and re-established it.” We are clearly to deal with a vital turning-point in the destinies of Israel—an era in which the fate of the religion of Israel, and therefore of the world, was in the balance. That Judaism emerged triumphant from its trial is evidenced by our presence here this afternoon. It cannot, then, be without interest and instruction for us to apply ourselves to questions such as these: What was the condition of the Jewish people in the fifth century? What was the problem with which Ezra had to grapple? How did he solve it?

In the Introductory Lecture to last year’s series on “Jewish History in the First Century,” I traced one of the root-causes of the dire calamity which befel the Jewish people to internecine warfare, to lack of cohesion among the various sections which constituted the nation, and to a chronic inability to live together in peace.³ If we seek to trace the cause of the troubles which faced Ezra in the fifth century, we find the same evils at work. You are aware that after the death of Solomon, the kingdom split into two. Canaan became one land with two kings and two distinct political bodies. There was the Kingdom of

¹ P. 9.

² *Succah*, 20a.

³ See *Judaism and the Beginnings of Christianity*, pp. 6 ff.

Israel in the North, comprising ten tribes, with Samaria as the capital; and there was the Kingdom of Judah in the South, comprising the tribe of that name, together with Benjamin and the Priests and Levites—with the capital in Jerusalem. Little love was lost between the two kingdoms. The monarchs of the Northern Kingdom were obviously opposed to any rapprochement with the South, because it might tend in the direction of fusion and unity, to the peril of their throne. At times there was warfare between the two nations—or rather, the two halves of the nation. Only occasionally did they combine forces against a common foe who threatened the existence of both. But weakened by this division, it was inevitable that the kingdoms could not endure. They were bound to fall victims, one by one, to invading forces; and that is what happened. Samaria heroically withstood a siege for nearly three years against the mighty power of Assyria, and succumbed in the summer of 722. Northern Palestine was depopulated; the Israelites were carried into captivity to the land of their conquerors and vanished from the pages of history. We have no record of what became of them; and we need have no doubt that the majority became absorbed in their surroundings. Ten tribes were lost to the people of Israel, only a fragment wandering back and merging with their brethren of the South.

Such being the fate of the Kingdom of Israel, it was merely a question of time before the Kingdom of Judah would likewise feel the

victor's heel on its neck. Less than a century-and-a-half later, in 586, the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and exiled the flower of Judea. To quote the words of II Kings, "The captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen" (xxv., 12). The Book of Lamentations describes in haunting language the state of the Holy City after it had been overrun by the Babylonian hordes: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!" In the fourth chapter there is a terrible picture drawn of the straits to which the people had been reduced: "They that are slain with the sword are better than they that are slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women have sodden their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people." The great prophet of this period, Jeremiah, must have felt that the end of his people was imminent, that the exiles in Babylon would meet the same fate as their kinsfolk in Assyria. For this reason, he based all his hopes for the future on the handful left in the Holy Land. He threw in his lot with them, and declined to accept the more comfortable life offered him in the land of captivity.

The remnant of the Judean kingdom, few in number and poverty-stricken, was not allowed

to remain undisturbed for long. The conqueror had appointed as their governor Gedaliah ben Ahikam who, influenced by the prophet Jeremiah, preached to the people the doctrine of submission to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. "Dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you" was the policy they both advocated. But there was a party bitterly opposed to this doctrine; and a member of the royal family, named Ishmael, contrived the assassination of Gedaliah. The murder of the governor had so profound an effect on the people, that a fast day is still in the Jewish calendar to commemorate the calamitous event. The terrified populace knew that the Babylonian king would not leave the crime unpunished; and fearing annihilation by his soldiers, they fled in panic to Egypt. What became of them there will probably be told in the lecture on "The Jewish Papyri discovered at Assouan."

The Holy Land was left deserted. Who could have doubted, at that time, that the concluding chapter of the history of Israel had been written! What hopes could be based on the exiles in Babylon? Why should their fate be different from that of their brethren in the North? Why should not Babylon be the grave of the Southern Kingdom as the Israelite Kingdom had disappeared in Assyria, and thus complete the total obliteration of the race? It was inevitable that pessimistic thoughts such as these should have struck hopeless despair into the hearts of the exiles. What was passing through the mind of

the people at that time is vividly depicted in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, where, in a vision, the prophet is shown a valley full of bones which were very dry ; and he is asked : “ Can these bones live ? ” That vision was suggested by the cry of the exiles themselves : “ Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost ; we are clean cut off.” The living nation had been reduced to a lifeless skeleton, so everybody believed. Yet the prophet was commissioned to announce in the name of God, “ I will put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land ; and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken, and performed it, saith the Lord.”

No words could have seemed farther from the realities of the situation than these. Nothing could have sounded more visionary, more improbable, than this message of hope. The majority scorned all belief in a return to their native land. Babylon was now their home. They were being treated in kindly manner by their captors, and given opportunities of prospering. “ The products of the soil and the artistic fabrics of Babylonia, which were eagerly sought after and largely exported, formed the staples of a flourishing commerce. Thus the former merchants of Judah were able, not only to continue their calling, but to follow it more actively. They undertook frequent journeys for the purpose of buying and selling, and began to accumulate great riches. In a luxurious country wealth produces luxury. The rich Judeans

imitated the effeminate life of the Babylonians, and even began to profess their idolatrous beliefs. So completely did the wealthy exiles identify themselves with the Babylonians, that they entirely forgot Judah and Jerusalem, which until lately had been the goal of their desires. They could not bear to think of their return ; they wished to be Babylonians, and looked with contempt upon the fanatical lovers of their own land.”¹ In this way Graetz describes the disintegrating process of assimilation which threatened to obliterate the Jewish name in its entirety. If all the exiles in Babylon had belonged to this class, nothing could have averted that fate. There was, however, a handful of “fanatical lovers of their own land,” despised by their wealthy brethren, and they formed the very frail thread upon which the destiny of the Jewish race depended. It was of these nationalist Jews that the tragic 137th Psalm speaks : “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land ? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not ; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy.”

But it was not only in their unquenchable love for the homeland that these faithful exiles were distinguished from the others ; they were determined to maintain their identity in the land of strangers until such time as God would be

¹ Graetz. *History of the Jews*, I, pp. 339 f.

pleased to restore them to their lost home. They were resolved not to be swallowed up among their neighbours; and they instinctively discovered the one and only method of securing their preservation. They had with them in Babylon a number of writings, the fruits of Hebraic inspiration. There were the Mosaic revelation, the utterances of the Prophets, and the outpourings of the Psalmists. By devoting themselves to these products of the Hebrew soul, by meeting together for the purpose of reading them and studying them and imbibing their spirit, they would continue to remember they were of Judea, though in Babylon. It was in this land of exile that the origins of the institution known as the Synagogue are probably to be sought. Three times in his book, the prophet Ezekiel mentions that "elders of Israel" assembled at his house, and "sat before" him, "to inquire of the Lord."¹ In the Book of Ezra,² among the men about to return to the Holy Land are some described as "those who understood." The object to be supplied to the verb is certainly "the Torah."

These two influences—love of the Scriptures, so far as they then existed, and love of the Holy Land—kept the soul of the Jewish Community alive until the pride of Babylon was humbled before the rise of a new power—Persia. The victories of Cyrus were heralded by a Hebrew prophet as the manifestation of the hand of God.

¹ *Ezek.* viii. 1, xiv. 1, xx. 1.

² *Ezra* viii. 16, cf. *Neb.* viii. 7.

In the 45th chapter of Isaiah, the Persian conqueror is called God's "Messiah," anointed. In the year 538 he issued his famous proclamation : "Thus saith Cyrus, King of Persia : All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the God of heaven, given me ; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people—his God be with him—let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel."¹ Some modern scholars have cast doubts on the authenticity of this edict. It is not improbable that in the version which has come down to us, the wording has been coloured by Hebraic thought. But that a proclamation was issued is attested by the central portion of the Book of Ezra—the Aramaic portion—to which the majority of critics attach historical value. The fact, however, is certain that the dream of years had at last become a reality—the dry bones were to be galvanized into life again. It has been estimated that between three and four hundred thousand Israelites had been transported to Babylon ; but the number of those prepared to undergo the hardships and trials of pioneers in rebuilding Judea was 42,360. Protected by an escort of Persian troops, they marched the distance of 600 miles to the goal of their hopes. In the highest spirits they set forth ; but it required all their optimism to save them from succumbing to despondency when they found what awaited them—a

¹ *Ezra* i., 2 f.

deserted and desolate land to be revived, a ruined metropolis to be rebuilt, and a Temple to be raised once more to the worship of God.

Animated with intense enthusiasm, the pioneers set themselves to accomplish their difficult undertaking; but they soon met with a serious disappointment. The Samaritans, the people of mixed origin who were their neighbours on the north, claimed the right to share in the reconstruction of the Temple, asserting they were part of the nation of Israel. That claim was carefully investigated and rejected. Non-Jewish historians usually criticise this decision adversely and attribute it to the narrow and exclusive character of Judaism. Are we, however, in possession of all the data which the Jewish leaders of that time weighed before making up their minds? May there not have been factors in the situation, unknown to us, which turned the scale against the admission of the Samaritans? It is so easy to judge—and judge wrongly—when one is not hampered with a knowledge of all the relevant facts! We may well suppose that the Jewish leaders were convinced that close association with the Samaritans, whose religion was a mixture of the Mosaic Torah and heathenism, would have a harmful effect upon the newly-constituted Commonwealth, that the Jews would assimilate what was bad in the practices of their neighbours.

However that may be, the rejection of their claim inspired the Samaritans with an intense hatred of the Jews, and they put obstacles in

their way. Reaction set in ; the returned Jews lost heart and abandoned the work of rebuilding the Temple. Two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, by their earnest pleading, re-awakened the popular zeal, and the work was not only resumed but carried to a successful conclusion. In 516, seventy years after the destruction, the new Temple, a less pretentious structure than the old, was opened for the service of God. With great rejoicing, the Jews resumed the life in the Holy Land which had been interrupted by the exile.

The joy was short-lived. The Samaritans worked against the Jews. They slandered them at the Persian Court, until they succeeded in arousing suspicions about the motives of the Jews in their re-established homeland. They were harbouring their strength and developing their resources—so it was alleged—to institute a revolt against the Persian hegemony. Unless the Persian king prevented the Jews from fortifying their cities, he would have to reckon with a rebellion against his rule. These fears became a reality with the Persian Government ; and the benevolent attitude they had hitherto adopted towards the Judeans changed. The Jews felt this difference keenly ; and dreading, perhaps, an attack from Persia, they resorted to a fatal method for self-protection. They allied themselves with the neighbouring peoples by inter-marrying with them. Like a ravaging plague this evil spread throughout the Judean Community.

The consequences were immediate and dread-

ful. The idealism and the religious fervour, with which the Jews had returned to their homes, waned and died. Of the children of these mixed marriages, the Book of Nehemiah declares, they "spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."¹ These words are sufficient to enable us to visualize the state of Judea in the time of the second and third generations which succeeded the enthusiastic pioneers. Their aspirations of a renewal of the great days of old seemed doomed to certain failure. Their descendants were becoming rapidly heathenised, utterly alienated from the hopes and purposes of their fathers. Once more the outlook was very black. There had been a brief spell of sunshine; but the clouds—thick clouds—had rolled across the sky again and all seemed dark and hopeless. The sacrifices of the returned exiles had apparently availed nothing; the fate of the people had been only temporarily averted; the final end seemed sure and imminent.

The ways of Providence are mysterious. We cannot understand the working of the divine will as it unfolds itself before our eyes, and while we look on current events as spectators. It is only when we turn back to past epochs that much which must have appeared meaningless to contemporaries becomes intelligible to us. Who, in the 5th century B.C.E., could have dreamt that salvation would come to Judea from Babylon? But so it was to be. The loyal among the Baby-

¹ *Nehemiah* xiii. 23 f.

lonian exiles had gone back to the Holy Land, as they thought, to assure the continuance of the nation ; and now a Babylonian exile was required to save his brethren in Judea from extinction !

The faithful, when they left Babylon, had carried the Torah with them to the land of its origin, and there it had become neglected and forgotten. In Babylon, however, it had met with a better fate. Some of the families which had remained behind were not actuated by the base motives of the assimilationists. They were Jewish in heart and life, although they were contented to reside in Babylon ; and they were also resolved that their ancestral Faith should flourish in a foreign land. They gladly contributed towards the rebuilding of the Temple ; and if they were debarred from bringing animals to the altar, they more than compensated for this omission, by treasuring the Hebrew Scriptures which were in their possession. The regular meetings for the reading and exposition of the Torah were kept up, and its precepts observed. There was even in their midst an order of men known as *Sopherim*, "Scribes," who devoted themselves to the study of the holy writings.

Among the Scribes was a member of a priestly family, named Ezra. He was a descendant of Hilkiah, the High Priest, whose discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple led to a religious reformation under King Josiah. The zeal for the Torah which had characterised the High Priest in the 7th century was not only inherited, but surpassed, by his great-grandson. Ezra's

whole life was bound up with the Torah. He was likewise a direct descendant of Phineas, of whom it was said that he was "zealous for his God." Judaism has never had a more zealous servant than this Scribe.

He suddenly determined to go to Judea. What were his reasons is not certain. It has been suggested that he had heard disquieting reports of the conditions there ; but this is not borne out by what is related in the 9th chapter of Ezra. There we are told that on his arrival, representatives of the people waited on him and reported the terrible prevalence of inter-marriage ; and the narrative proceeds with these words : " And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down appalled." The information could only have had this effect upon him if it was startling in its unexpectedness. More probable, therefore, is the supposition that he was inspired with the desire to live on the hallowed soil and enjoy the privileges offered by the service of the Temple. And most probable of all, he was moved by the will of God, and was elected His instrument for the accomplishment of the divine purposes.

Ezra came up from Babylon in the year 458, accompanied by about 1,600 men, besides women and children ; and his visit was a turning-point in the history of Judaism. He at once perceived the desperate condition of the community and the necessity for a desperate remedy. It was a question of life and death, so there could be

no half-measures. If the people was to be saved from religious and national extinction, the cancer which was threatening its very existence—the cancer of mixed marriage—must be mercilessly cut from the body. Human sentiment—the affection of husband and wife, the love of parent and child—must be sacrificed for the national weal. No time was to be lost; so he immediately began a fiery campaign for the dissolution of these ill-fated marriages. He so worked on the feelings of the people that many, of their own accord, undertook to send away their non-Jewish wives. In a moment of zeal they exclaimed, “We have broken faith with our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them.”¹ Ezra imposed a solemn vow on them to carry out their undertaking. A proclamation was issued throughout Judea summoning every Jew to present himself at Jerusalem within three days, under the penalty of forfeiting his property and excommunication from the Community. At the assemblies, Ezra, who was supported by many leaders of the people, demanded that everyone who had contracted a marriage of this kind should immediately dissolve it. Swept by the spirit of fervour which he had fanned into flame, they agreed to purge the community of the evil. A strict investigation was made into every

¹ *Ezra* x. 2 f.

family ; and wherever the taint existed, it was ruthlessly removed. No exception was allowed ; and men of influential position, like Sanballat and Tobiah, were rigorously excluded from the Community. Ezra did not fear the enmity which he was rousing in those who found themselves driven forth from the people to which they were attached ; his only fear was lest his work of reform should lack absolute thoroughness.

Was Ezra justified in the stern measures—inhuman measures, as many assert—which he adopted ? Non-Jewish writers frequently condemn the narrowness of his mind, the exclusiveness of his religious outlook, the tribal character of his Judaism. But I submit that this is a superficial criticism which fails to take into account the peculiarly difficult problem with which Ezra was grappling. One significant fact, upon which emphasis should be laid, is that the contemporary prophet, Malachi, was in fullest accord with him. The Talmud suggests the identification of the two ; but this is improbable. What is striking is the identity of their views. The last of the Hebrew prophets, Malachi, can scarcely be accused of narrowness and exclusiveness. It was he who gave utterance to the sublime dictum, “ Have we not all one Father ? Hath not one God created us ? ” Can universalism be more finely enunciated than in these noble words ? Yet in the same chapter where they occur, the prophet inveighs in bitter language against those who had been guilty of the offence which Ezra sought to stamp out. He denounces

the Jews who had repudiated the wives of their youth and "married the daughter of a strange god" (ii. 11). The priests, who had been particularly involved in this evil, come in for special denunciation; and he foretells that when God's messenger comes, he will "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; and there shall be they that shall offer unto the Lord offerings in righteousness" (iii. 3). Clearly, then, there was no antagonism between prophet and scribe. They both agreed in their diagnosis of the ailment which was afflicting the community, and they prescribed the same cure.

There is no evidence that Ezra repudiated the inspiring doctrines of the earlier prophets which dwell upon Israel's mission to the world. One has no reason to doubt that he, too, looked forward to the ideal future which they had depicted in such glowing colours, when the earth would be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. But Ezra perceived only too clearly that the universalist aspect of Judaism was out of tune with the spirit of his age, and, if stressed, might well prove a positive danger. We have seen that it was essentially a time of assimilation; and under the guise of universalism, the assimilationists would have succeeded in their purpose and brought about the absorption of the race and the obliteration of the ideals which it represented. It was only the Jew who was sincerely attached to his people and steadfast in his religious

Faith who could safely indulge in the universalist hope ; and the Jews of that type were an insignificant minority in that age. The Jewish people had to be saved before the spiritualisation of the world could be thought of—that was the predominant factor in the determination of Ezra's policy. One must, therefore, endorse the judgment of the Jewish historian, Dubnow : “ At first sight this activity might appear almost too one-sided. But if we summon to mind a picture of the conditions prevailing in those days, we are forced to the conclusion that, in the interest of national restoration, a consistent course was imperative. In point of fact, however, some of Ezra's innovations testify to the broad-minded, reformatory character of this activity. . . . The object steadily aimed at was the elevation of the whole body of the people to the plane of spirituality, its transformation, in accordance with the Biblical injunction, into a ‘ kingdom of priests.’ ”¹

The total eradication of intermarriage was but a means to an end. It was the pulling down which had, of necessity, to precede the building up—the weeding of the garden prior to its cultivation. Before dealing with the constructive measures devised by Ezra, we have to digress for a few moments and turn our attention to a colony of Jews which had been established in Persia. In this connection, one immediately thinks of what is related in the Book of Esther. You are probably aware that the majority of

¹ *Jewish History*, pp. 62 f.

modern critics regard this book as fiction, not history. Mordecai recalls the god Marduk, Esther the goddess Ishtar; so how could Jews have adopted such repellant names? the critics ask. There is no accounting for what Jews might do. Is there not a name quite common amongst us, Isidore, which means "the gift of Jesus"—a Christianised form of "Theodore," the gift of God! Consequently, to read of a Jew bearing the surprising name of "Isidore" is no evidence that the person is a myth. I might mention that the problem of the historicity of the Book of Esther is being studied afresh by some Jewish scholars—Jampel and Hoschander; and the results of their research should make one hesitate to dogmatise too confidently about its fictional character.

However that may be, in Persia there appeared a man who was to play an important rôle in the destinies of Judea. Ezra had supreme gifts as a religious teacher and organizer, but he lacked the qualities of the statesman and political ruler. He was not a man of affairs, and the times required such a leader. While the Scribe was devoting all his energies to reviving the religious life of the Community, essential precautions were being overlooked. The people of Judea were surrounded by implacable foes, and were exposed to attacks against which they had no protection. There was a crying need for an energetic leader to take charge of the secular side of the communal life; and the hour produced the man. In the Persian Capital, Shushan, the office of

royal cup-bearer was held by a Jew named Nehemiah. When he was visited by a kinsman from Judea, he inquired as to the state of affairs in the Holy Land, and was told "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."¹ The distressing news went to his heart. He brooded and grieved over the deplorable condition of the Holy City, until his sorrow was reflected in his gloomy looks. His royal master noticed that he was looking ill and worried, and inquired the cause. Nehemiah said to him, "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" He implored the king to permit him to return to Judea and empower him to build up the wall for the Holy City. The king granted him his request on the promise that he would go back to Persia when his mission was accomplished. He also furnished him with letters calling upon the governors of the surrounding peoples to provide him with building materials.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in the year 445, without proclaiming his presence and his authority. He wisely determined to examine the situation before taking action; and he could do this more thoroughly in private. At night he would go out to view the strategic points of the city and note where they required

¹ *Nehemiah* i. 3.

to be strengthened and where new fortifications should be erected. Having completed his survey and prepared his plans, he revealed himself to the leaders, showed his credentials from the Persian Court, and announced his intention to build the wall and fortify the city. They entered with enthusiasm into his project, and immediately began on the work. The rejected half-Jews, sons of mixed marriages, led by Sanballat and Tobiah, renewed their efforts to frustrate the work of rebuilding and threatened to stop it by force. The Book of Nehemiah describes very vividly in what trying conditions the task was undertaken. Half the men worked, while the other half stood by, armed for battle, in case of an onslaught. Nehemiah himself kept a constant look-out with a trumpeter by his side, to sound the alarm if necessary. Through his indomitable zeal, the task was successfully completed.

He next had to turn his attention to a serious social problem. The poorer section of the people had been compelled to borrow money from the wealthier Jews to pay their taxes. Their land had been mortgaged, and their children were threatened with slavery if the debts were not repaid. Nehemiah summoned the people to an assembly, and in stinging words exposed the evil that was impairing the vitality of the nation. "We," he said, [i.e., the Jews of Persia], "after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, that sold themselves unto the heathen; and would ye nevertheless sell your brethren, and

should they sell themselves unto us ? ”¹ His speech, re-enforced by the example he had himself set by not accepting any revenue as Governor of Judea, had the desired effect ; and the poor had their debts remitted to them.

Having accomplished this great work for his people, Nehemiah had paved the way for Ezra to institute his religious reforms which were to have the effect of revitalizing the nation and saving the Jewish name from extinction to this day. For the Judaism we know is largely a development of the system as promulgated by Ezra. Mr. Travers Herford has with truth declared : “ The significance of the work of Ezra is this, that he stopped the process by which the religious vitality of Israel was draining away, and he gave a lead, opened a new line of development, turned the thought and energy of his people into a direction where progress was possible almost without end.”²

What was the solution discovered by Ezra for arresting the decay of, and re-invigorating the nation ? I cannot answer that question better than by quoting a sentence from the remarkable address, delivered recently in New York, by Mr. Zangwill. He then said, “ History, which is largely a record of the melting of minorities in majorities, records no instance of the survival of a group not segregated in space or not protected by a burning faith as by a frontier of fire.” This lesson

¹ *Nehemiah* v. 8.

² *Pharisaism*, p. 9.

of history had evidently been discerned by Ezra. He understood that the Jews could not be utterly segregated in space. Not only were there branches of the national tree in Egypt, Babylon and Persia to be taken into consideration ; but contact between the Jews in Judea and their neighbours could not be avoided. If, then, the Jewish nation was to be preserved, it must be ringed round “ by a burning faith as by a frontier of fire ”—a most apposite metaphor, since the Bible itself speaks of “ a fiery law.” The Jew must have a religion which would not only continually distinguish him from the heathen, but would likewise be a constant reminder to him that he was a member of the Jewish race and faith. The Jew was to be demarcated from his neighbours not merely by a creed, but by a mode of living. His manner of worship would be different ; his home would be different ; even in the common acts of daily life, there would be distinguishing features which would constantly recall his Jewishness. His life, in every detail, was to be controlled by Torah—by the written enactments of the Mosaic code and their development in the corporate life of the people, as the altered conditions demanded change.

Before the people could be expected to observe the Torah, they had to be familiar with its contents. In the year following Nehemiah’s arrival, in 444, Ezra inaugurated a system of teaching, by summoning a public assembly and reading the Torah to the people. Not only did he arrange for weekly gatherings for prayer and

study of the Torah, but recognising that Jewish farmers, living at a distance from the towns, would not be able to join in these assemblies on the Sabbath, he arranged—so tradition relates—for a Pentateuchal recital on Mondays and Thursdays, which were the market-days, to enable these men to drink from the fountain of Jewish life. He also established in Judea the order of *Sopherim*, “Scribes,” to which he had belonged in Babylon. There must be authoritative teachers of the Torah who would be able to guide the people and instruct them.

One other great institution is to be attributed to him, if Jewish tradition is again to be relied upon—and that is the founding of the *Keneseth Hagedolah*, “the Great Synagogue.” It must be admitted that the true facts about this Synod are clouded with the mists of uncertainty. Many Christian scholars deny that it ever existed. But Derenbourg¹ has pointed out very cogently that the known data only became explicable on the supposition that some such body as the “Great Synagogue” did function at that time. On the one side, in the fifth century, we find the Jews steeped in ignorance and heathenism; on the other side, in the second century, we see a community of Jews, zealous for the Torah and staunch in their faith. How account for this latter phenomenon, without pre-supposing a body of earnest teachers who reared a generation of disciples to take their place after they had gone, to be succeeded by another generation, and so

¹ *Essai sur l'histoire.*

on for over two hundred years? Further, although Ezra was a priest, he never undertook sacerdotal service; and he seems to have had no faith in the priesthood as a source of religious guidance for the people. The priests had too often set a bad example, and misled the rest of the Community. Failing the priesthood, there was no other body possessing authority to which the Jews could look for instruction and guidance. Is it, then, improbable—nay, rather, is it not certain—that Ezra would call into existence an Institution so essential to his purpose? His eyes were fixed on the future, not only the present. He had to make sure, so far as it was humanly possible, that his work would not fall to pieces on his death. The obvious plan which would suggest itself to his mind would be the establishment of a Synod of men, learned in the Torah, imbued with his own zealous spirit, who would direct the life of the people in accordance with its principles. Moreover, would not a Scribe like Ezra turn to the chapters of the Scriptures for guidance in his difficult problems? If Moses found the control of the people too much for one man, would Ezra attempt to do what Moses had failed to do? As Jethro had advised his son-in-law to gather together a council of helpers to assist him in the government of the people, Ezra would certainly be influenced by this precedent to adopt a similar plan.

It is so easy to deny; and Christian scholars always display a bias against whatever rests upon Talmudical evidence. Although the

weighty names of Wellhausen and Schürer are among those who regard the "Great Synagogue" as a myth, the eminent Jewish scholar, Professor Krauss, who has written an excellent essay on the subject,¹ declares: "I am of opinion that historical continuity demands also that no great period of time devoid of historical life can be imagined. Eliminate the Great Synod, and the period between 433 and 333, from the later activity of Nehemiah till Alexander the Great, would be simply without history; for historical events find their historical recorders, and an absence of historical records would lead to the assumption that nothing worth recording had happened. Can such a thing be imagined? Has a century flown on in the life of a people without its having produced anything worthy of preserving for posterity? To assume that the Talmudical sources wanted to fill such gap in the historical life by the fiction of the Great Synod is to misunderstand the character of these sources; for nothing is more remote from them than the construction of a pragmatic history, even in cases of real facts. Since, therefore, no tendency of the kind can be attributed to the Talmudical information, the doubts as to the truth of these reports are entirely without foundation. . . . Everything speaks in favour of, and nothing against, the historical existence of the Great Synod."

Two matters of supreme importance were, according to the Talmud, relegated to the

¹ *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Old Series, x, pp. 349 f.

“Great Synagogue.” The first was the canon of the Scriptures. There was a mass of writings in existence at that time, some of recent composition, like Ezekiel, Zechariah, Haggai, etc.; and the people needed instruction as to which were to be considered holy and which secular, which authors were inspired and which not. If Ezra established the authority of the Pentateuch, it is to the men of the “Great Synagogue” that we owe, what might be called, the first edition of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Talmud further relates that this Synod created a ritual. Jewish scholars attribute the Eighteen Benedictions, in their earliest form, to this body. It laid the foundations of the Synagogue Service as we now have it. Formerly only a meeting for the reading of the Torah, that religious function was now surrounded with a liturgy and thus a Jewish service of prayer was formulated.

The religious work of the “Great Synagogue” was based on the main principles which have been preserved in the well-known dictum at the beginning of the *Pirke Aboth*: “Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many disciples; make a fence to the Torah.” In the first place, the Community must not be governed by the caprice of individuals or by personal predilections. “Judgment” must be the foundation on which the Commonwealth is established—“judgment,” which is another name for the practical application of the principles contained in the Torah. Those who are to govern the people must be

“deliberate” in their judgment. There must be no hasty decision, but thorough investigation in the light of Biblical teaching. It is at once evident that the men of the “Great Synagogue” here aimed at making the Torah the controlling law of the Community and permeating the national life with its doctrines.

The second purpose they kept before them was the raising of many disciples. A Community must have an earnest regard for its future, if its existence is to be assured. It had been demonstrated by events still fresh in their memory how precarious was the tenure of the national life unless there were teachers imbued with fiery zeal and ardent love for the Torah, whose whole endeavour was to instil its tenets in the hearts of the people. But teachers are mortal; their time of service comes to an end; and their work dies with them unless devoted disciples sit at their feet and, when called upon, take up the task which the veterans had been compelled to lay down. Hence with much foresight, the men of the “Great Synagogue” took care that there should not be a dearth of pupils, that the teaching of the Torah to the people should be firmly assured for future generations.

And lastly, seeing that the Torah was the very breath of life to the nation, that without it slow but sure disappearance among heathen neighbours was the only fate in store for the Jewish people, the precious life-giving source had to be carefully protected. Not only had

the Torah to be learnt and taught, it had to be practised, to become intimately interwoven with every phase of the national and individual existence. An infraction of the Torah was a blow at the vitality of the people; therefore a fence must be raised around the Torah to guard it from human carelessness and thoughtlessness. Restrictions and prohibitions had to be devised that go beyond the actual prescription of the Law, which a man might inadvertently overstep without violating the Law itself.

These three endeavours of the "Great Synagogue" are the mainsprings of Jewish effort at the period in which the Biblical History comes to an end. Although for the next century-and-a-half we have no information about the fortunes of the Jewish people, we cannot doubt that those endeavours were faithfully pursued. For when we again come upon a period where the darkness is dispelled, there faces us a state of things in the most striking contrast to what we had seen before the curtain fell. We find a Community consisting of men so attached to the Torah that they were prepared to die without self-defence when attacked on the Sabbath; we find men so faithful to Judaism that they pitted themselves against apparently hopeless odds to fight for its cause. Before the appearance of Ezra and Nehemiah and the men of the "Great Synagogue," there is a Community sick unto death, listless and apathetic, disloyal to the Torah. Within the space of two-and-a-half centuries, the anaemic, dying Community is

transformed into the Maccabean army locked in a fierce struggle with the forces of Syria for the right of serving God in freedom. A wonderful transformation, in truth! The prophecy of Ezekiel had been literally fulfilled: the dry bones had been infused with the Spirit of God, had been revived and grown into an exceeding great host.

From our survey of the history of the Jews at the close of the Biblical period, there leap to the mind two irresistible conclusions of eternal significance to the House of Israel. The first is: undiluted nationalism cannot of itself secure the salvation and assure the continued existence of the Jewish people. Without the religious revival created by Ezra, the soil of Judea would have become the sepulchre of the nation. The second conclusion is: the only unfailing preservative of the Jewish people, tested in the crucible of experience, is the life-giving spirit which radiates from the Torah.

THE JEWISH PAPYRI DISCOVERED
AT ASSOUAN

BY
HERBERT M. ADLER

THE JEWISH PAPYRI DISCOVERED AT ASSOUAN

SOME of you may have read the title of this lecture with qualms of trepidation, having a lurking suspicion that you are to have administered to you by an amateur an hour's disquisition on a highly technical topic of antiquity—a truly appalling prospect. Let me, therefore, at once relieve your fears. I can make no claim to a specialist's knowledge, and, so far as these documents are concerned, I shall make no assumption of any stores of accumulated knowledge on your part—a really rude hypothesis. I chose this subject from a purely selfish motive, because it interested me. A few years ago I happened to take up a reproduction that had been published of some old papyri that had been unearthed in Egypt, and being rather attracted by their contents—for they were legal documents and I am, or was, a lawyer—I gave a little more time to them and I began to realise that there was something here much higher than mere food for legal experts and that, in fact, these documents and deeds disclosed, almost like a succession of photographs or the film of a cinematograph, scenes from the every-day life of a Jewish colony in Egypt in Bible times. The documents were mainly of a personal or family nature, conveyances,

marriage-settlements and so forth. A few years later, however, a fresh discovery was made, the authenticity of which at first provoked the greatest scepticism. It seemed too good to be true. A number of additional papyri had come to light from the same place, and amongst them this time were writings of a most arresting character, public documents, such as official despatches relating to the Community, a communal subscription list, a chapter of history, and even something in the nature of a novel.

These records are, next to the Siloam inscription, the earliest Jewish writings that have survived to our day in their original form. It is amazing, therefore, that even now so little should generally be known of this inestimable addition to our knowledge of the condition of the Jews during a critical period of their history.

Let me be a little more specific. In 1904, some workmen engaged in constructing a new road near Assouan on the River Nile came across, or said that they had come across, a wooden box containing a number of papyri. The place where they were discovered is littered with the ruins of the ancient town of Syene. Syene, or Sun, and Assouan are, of course, only different forms of the same name. The documents were in Aramaic. Their existence was at once reported to Mr. Robert Mond, who was excavating at Thebes, and he telegraphed that they were to be kept for his inspection. Mr. Mond arrived at Assouan and purchased the documents with the exception of two papyri which had already

been bought by Lady William Cecil. He presented them to the Cairo Museum with the stipulation that he should first be allowed to publish them, as well as those belonging to Lady William Cecil. The documents were photographed and edited with great care by Professor Sayce and Dr. Cowley, and were published at Oxford in 1906 in a luxurious, but unfortunately also rather an expensive, form.

The papyri proved to be practically perfect in condition. The very strings tied round them were intact and the clay seals upon the strings were still unbroken. They were legal documents, title-deeds and so forth, and this accounts for their careful preservation, as also for the fortunate circumstance that they are all dated. The dates cover the period from 471 B.C. to 411 B.C., roughly the time when Ezra and Nehemiah lived. They deal with the private affairs of various members of a family belonging to a Jewish settlement in the neighbouring small island of Yeb or Elephantine, the elephant-island situated in the middle of the Nile, just opposite Assouan. Quite apart from the interest attaching to Jewish manuscripts of this vast antiquity both from the aspect of writing and of language, they shed a flood of light on the position of this little community, their customs, their business and their religion. And I propose a little later to give you a brief account of the story thus unfolded.

Between 1906 and 1908 came the second discovery. In the ruins of three houses of Elephantine itself were found a number of

further papyri and ostraka. This second collection extends in age over an even longer period than the first, viz., from 494 to 407 B.C., that is practically the whole of the fifth century before this era, and it touches upon events and personages of far more than local or temporary interest. We shall hear from these documents of Palestine ; we shall come across characters we already know from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and we shall obtain a thoroughly astounding picture of the worship and beliefs of this community, a revelation which at last enables us to understand something of the cults and admixtures which had polluted the Hebrew's simple and single monotheism and against which the prophets of Israel and Judah had launched their fierce denunciations. The complete collection of these latter documents was finally given to the world in a splendid work by Professor Sachau, published in Leipzig in 1911 with a translation and notes in German. Both sets of documents were made available to the English reader in the translation published by Dr. Cowley in 1919, under the title "Jewish Documents of the time of Ezra" whilst last year the same gifted scholar brought out a full Hebrew text with translation and notes. The notes, by the way, though full of material, are quite free from pedantry and dullness.

I must touch for a moment on the question of the authenticity of the documents. Their genuine character has now been generally admitted. There have been sceptics, for example, Professor

Margoliouth, Gustav Jahn and Dr. Belléli. One of the grounds for their suspicion rests on the dates of the month given in the various documents. These dates are usually given according to both the Egyptian and the Hebrew calendar, and it is said that they do not coincide. Other authorities, however, profess to be able to reconcile this alleged discrepancy, and in any case any theory must necessarily involve a reconstruction of cycles and calendars which cannot be other than problematical. Secondly, various Hebraisms have been detected ; to take a single example, the use of צדקה for charity. Yet this only goes to show that the Aramaic spoken by the Jews of the colony was not faultless. After all, it must be remembered that they were Hebrews by descent and it is hardly unnatural that they should have lapsed here and there into their ancestral tongue. But apart from all this, one broad consideration strikes us forcibly. The fabrication, if such it is, postulates an erudition in language and history—I pass over the brilliance of the imagination required—so vast that one wonders why the forger did not disclose to the world his surpassing gifts which would have fitted him for a University Chair and a transcending status amongst scholars. One must credit him too with taking an inordinate amount of labour on what was, after all, a very remote speculation. For, whilst it is true some of the documents were not discovered by explorers *in situ*, but were sold by Arabs who stated that they had found them in the ground, others were actually unearthed

by a scholar whose reliability has never been called in question, Dr. Rubensohn, a member of the German School in Egypt. Can we suppose that the products of such infinite toil and ingenuity were buried in the soil on the mere speculation that the excavator's pick might bring them to light? The knave must have been not merely a great scholar, but a shining optimist.

The documents have cleared up not a few doubtful points of chronology, which is the backbone of history. I will give but two instances. We are now able to fix the time of Nehemiah and Sanballat. The Book of Nehemiah records dates in the terms of years of Artaxerxes. The trouble is that there were three kings of this name and it was not certain which of them was referred to. The first ruled from 465-424 B.C., the second from 405-359, and the third from 359-338. It is now clear that the first Artaxerxes is intended, so that when Nehemiah speaks of his return to Palestine as taking place in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes we know that this means the year 453 B.C. In the second place, the doubts left by the vague statements of Josephus are now set at rest with regard to the period in which the high priest John and the Governor Bagoas lived. You may remember the terrible crime with which these two names are connected. John was the high priest who killed his brother Joshua in the Temple. The Persian governor was horrified by this atrocity and visited his displeasure upon the whole community in a practical manner by putting a tax upon them

for some years. We now know for certain that this must have happened after, but not long after, the year 408 B.C. For both John and Bagoas are referred to in a letter of that date, the one as high priest and the other as governor.

Elephantine itself was an island of no little importance. Apart from its strategic position as guarding the Nile and the first cataract, it was situated on the borders of Nubia. It had a religious significance as well. It was the seat of the Egyptian ram-headed God Chnub or Chnum. This deity had at one time a temple in the island and an order of priests. The ruins of this temple have been discovered and actually the mummified bodies of rams, no doubt sacred animals that were well-cared for in their lifetime. The existence of this native cult played an important, and as we shall see, a sinister part in the fate of the Jewish colonists.

We discover a military settlement or colony. It is called the **חילא יהודיא**, i.e., the army or force of the Jews in Yeb or Elephantine and in Sun or Syene, the town on the mainland which faces the island. The headquarters were at Syene. The colony is divided into military groups; **דגל**, "companies" we should probably call them. You will remember the word **דגל**, or "banner" which is used in Numbers and is applied to the military formation of the tribes. Six of these companies are known to us by name; four of them bear Persian names, e.g., that of Artabanos, a name known from Greek history. Two are of Babylonian origin. The General

has a military court at Syene. Amongst the Jews, and dwelling cheek by jowl with them, we find Egyptians, Persians and Babylonians. This military colony, however, seems to have had little that was genuinely martial about it. The characters we meet with, whether Jews or gentiles, though they drew rations, are not men of war, but peaceful followers of commerce : merchants, contractors and watermen. In fact there can be little doubt that the colony, when we see it, was about as military as the Salvation Army. But it had been a real fighting unit once. We might perhaps have guessed that we have the surviving framework of a past age when the colonists were a real garrison who got up, willy-nilly, at reveille, and who had to turn in, under pains and penalties, at "lights out." That this is actually the case we know from Herodotus.¹ He tells us that for defensive purposes King Psammetichus established a garrison in Elephantine. This may be the Egyptian King Psammetichus II, who reigned from 594 to 589 B.C., but there is at least one strong ground for believing that Psammetichus I is intended, who ruled from 660 to 610 B.C. It appears that this unfortunate garrison was entirely forgotten by the Egyptian war-office, pigeon-holed, one supposes, in some bureaucratic drawer. After three years of isolation the soldiers took the law into their own hands and deserted in a body, trekking to the south. They eventually put themselves under the protection of the King of

Ethiopia, who promptly gave them up to their lawful sovereign. What their fate was we do not know, but it can hardly have been agreeable. A new garrison was sent in their place and it existed in the time of Herodotus. It was composed of a motley mixture of races, and it looks as if this curious feature was the result of high policy. Egyptian troops having been found unreliable, foreign soldiers were brought in with the added precaution that they were selected from different nationalities, not the only experiment of the kind known to history.

That this substituted garrison which replaced the unfortunate Egyptian contingent consisted in part of Jews we learn from an entirely independent source. The letter of Aristeeas of the second century B.C. tells us that soldiers from Palestine were imported into Egypt by Psammetichus, who needed them for aid in his warfare against the Ethiopians. If Psammetichus II is referred to, the settlement would have taken place at the very time when Judaea was being conquered by the Babylonian empire. For Jerusalem was sacked in the year 586 B.C. If, on the other hand, the colony was founded under Psammetichus I, the Jews must have left their country whilst it was under the rule of Menasseh or Josiah.

Of one thing we can be quite certain. By the year 525 B.C. the colony had already been long established. For one of our documents tell us that when Cambyzes, the Persian King, conquered Egypt (which he did in that year),

he found the Jewish temple there and left it standing. Of this temple we shall hear more. Curiously enough it was just by this temple that the families lived whose private affairs have come to light through the discovery of that collection of title-deeds to which I have already referred.

The first deed is dated the 17th Ellul, in the fourteenth year of King Xerxes (i.e., B.C. 471), and is made between one Qonijah, the son of Zadok, described as "an Aramaean of Syene," and one Mahsejah, son of Jedonjah, also an Aramaean of Syene. The two men were neighbours and occupied adjoining houses close to the Royal Street **ארה מלכה**, in which the Temple **אגורא** was situated. Qonijah wanted to build a wall. For this purpose he needed the permission of his neighbour, possibly because he was infringing his right to light. Anyhow Mahsejah put him under terms. He allowed him to build the wall, but stipulated that the wall itself should become his and that he should have a right of way between the two houses. This is all set out in legal language and the document concludes with the name of the scribe Pelatiah, son of Ahio, and the witnesses, who are :

Mahaseh, son of Isaiah

(two Jewish names).

Satibarzanes, son of Athar-ili

(a Persian and a Babylonian name).

Shemaiah, son of Hosea

(both Jewish names).

Phrataphernes, son of Artaphernes
(both Persian names).

Bagdates, son of Nabu-Kadurri
(a Persian and a Babylonian name).

Three more names are given.

The docket is marked : "Deed of the brick wall which he built, written by Qoniyah to Mahaseh."

Seven years later our friend Mahsejah had some further trouble with his house. This time it was with another neighbour, one Dargman, a workman of Yeb the fortress (הבירה; cf. שושן הבירה), about the boundary of their two properties. They went to law before one Damidata and his colleagues, the judges, who imposed an oath on Mahsejah to swear by JHO, the God in Yeb, that the contested ground was actually his. Mahsejah took the oath and gained the day. This document is an acknowledgment of the judgment so obtained. It is dated the 18th Chislev, in the year when Artaxerxes ascended the throne.

Mahsejah had a daughter, one Mibtahjah, a lady of character and some business acumen. In 459, five years after the date of the last deed, she married one Jezanjah bar Uriah. The lucky man was another neighbour, whose house adjoined Mahsejah's on the west. Her father made a settlement upon her and endowed her with the very same house about which we have heard before. You may like to hear the terms of the deed between him and his son-in-law :—

"There is the land of one house belonging to

me, west of thy house, which I have given to Mibtahjah, my daughter thy wife and I have written a deed of gift for her respecting it." Then follow the measurements. "Now I Mahsejah say to thee : ' Build upon this land and stock it with its cattle and live on it with thy wife ; but thou hast no power to sell this house or to give it as a gift to any others ; but thy sons by my daughter Mibtahjah have rights over it after thee. If to-morrow or any later day thou buildest on this land and my daughter shall afterwards divorce thee and leave thee, she shall have no power to take it and give it to others ; but thy sons by Mibtahjah shall have rights over it in return for the work which thou hast expended upon it. If thou shall put her away from thee, one-half of the house shall be hers to take, but to the other half thou hast full right in return for the buildings which thou hast built upon this land. Furthermore as to that half thy sons by Mibtahjah shall have the right to it after thee.'"¹

Mahsejah was evidently determined to leave nothing to chance, and this provision for divorce inserted on the occasion of the marriage, though unsentimental, is not devoid of fatherly prudence. The striking feature is the disclosure that Jewish wives could divorce their husbands. And indeed it is amazing to find how complete were women's rights in this community. They could hold property, land or chattels. They could and did go into business either for themselves or in

¹ *Aramaic Papyri*, Ed. Sayce & Cowley, 1906, Alexander Moring Ltd., Papyrus C. This is No. 9 in Cowley's *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923.

partnership. They could appear in court. And as you see, they could give the *congé* to their husbands.

Mibtahjah and her husband must have prospered. For thirteen years later we find that she was actually in the position of a creditor as against her father. She had sold him goods and he found himself unable to pay cash for them. In the end he conveyed another house to her in order to wipe off the debt. We may wonder where she obtained her wealth. It is never spoken of as her husband's. The solution is given by the next deed which shows that she had gone into partnership with one Pi, the son of Pahi, a builder, clearly an Egyptian. The business was an extensive one and included dealings in grain, clothing, bronze and iron. In the year 440 this partnership was dissolved. An account is taken by them, apparently as the result of a partnership action, and the lady takes an oath. And here comes an extraordinary revelation. She swears by the Egyptian goddess Seti—a truly amazing act on the part of a daughter of Israel. But again the riddle is explained.

For only two months later we find her marrying an Egyptian, one As-hor, son of Teos, a royal builder or architect. What had happened to her first husband we do not know for certain, but Professor Hoonacker gives cogent reasons based on another document for the conclusion that Jezanjah had been divorced and had decamped, or more probably that he first decamped and was then divorced.

At any rate Mibtahjah married again and apparently married well. The second marriage settlement is also in existence. As-hor, who seems to be a man of substance, settles upon the bride a considerable miscellany of property. The settlement is made between him and Mahsejah, an Aramaean of Syene. "I came to thy house," runs the document, "for thee to give me thy daughter Mibtahjah to wife. She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and for ever. I have given thee as the marriage-settlement of thy daughter Mibtahjah the sum of 5 shekels royal standard. It is accepted by thee and thy heart is content therewith. I have delivered into the hand of thy daughter Mibtahjah as money for an outfit, 1 Karash, 2 shekels 1 garment of wool, new, embroidered, dyed on both sides, 8 cubits long by 5, worth the sum of 2 Karash, 8 shekels royal" ¹

Other articles are enumerated: a closely-woven shawl (new), a garment of spun wool, a mirror of bronze, a tray of bronze, two cups of bronze, a bowl of bronze and a new ivory cosmetic-box. Mibtahjah was no longer in the hey-day of her youth, but she appears to have retained the desire to make the best of her appearance, a weakness which her wooer was not slow to divine.

In this settlement also, far-sighted provisions are contained to guard against the event of divorce. "If to-morrow (save the mark!) or

¹ Sayce & Cowley, *Papyrus G.* See also Cowley, No. 15

any later day Mibtahjah shall stand up in the congregation and say: I divorce As-hor my husband, the price of divorce כסף שנאה shall be on her head," i.e., as is explained, she is to restore the value of the husband's settlement. Similar provisions are contained in the event of As-hor's divorcing Mibtahjah. A heavy penalty is imposed upon the husband in the event of his forcibly driving her from the home.

You will notice the interesting phrase "stand up in the congregation," יקום בערה, which can only mean appearance before a Jewish religious or ecclesiastical court—something, in fact, like going to the Beth Din. The difference is only this, that the civil law in England no longer allows the Beth Din to grant a divorce. It can only ratify one. But in Elephantine, as in Jerusalem, the religious court had full jurisdiction. More than this: apparently it even exercised jurisdiction where one of the spouses was not of the Jewish community unless indeed we regard As-hor as a camouflaged Jew, which I cannot but think most unlikely.

Let us follow Mibtahjah's fortunes. By her second husband she had two sons, Jedonjah and Mahsejah; the latter, you will observe, is called after his grandfather. These two sons had to defend their title to their mother's house which she had acquired with her first husband (the unfortunate Jezaniah), against the claim of a nephew of the last-named gentleman. This they did successfully. The

interesting point is that their actual father is no longer spoken of as As-hor, but as Nathan. It appears, therefore, that As-hor had become a convert, and this surmise is the more likely since he is always referred to as Nathan simply without the addition of his father's name.

The last document of this bundle is dated 411 B.C. Mibtahjah is now dead and her sons are dividing her property. Her possessions include a number of Egyptian slaves, namely one Tebo and her three sons. The slaves are tattooed on the arm with the name of Mibtahjah in Aramaic, and also with a *Yod*. Two of the slaves are apportioned to the two brothers, one to each. The mother and her three sons are left for later distribution.

And so Mibtahjah and her busy life, her husbands and her slaves pass out of sight and are lost in the dust of ages.

These legal documents will give you some idea of Jewish domestic life in the colony. We learn more from other papyri. There were actually two colonies. Besides that at Elephantine (or Yeb) there was that at Syene (or Sun) on the mainland opposite the island. We hear of Jews or Aramaeans of Yeb and of Aramaeans of Sun. There was a Persian governor of Elephantine and another of Syene. During a critical period of this history the former official was a corrupt and cynical pasha called Widarnag; the latter was his son, who worked hand in hand with him. Both officials were subordinate to the satrap or governor-general of Egypt. One Arsam held

this important post for a considerable time and we shall hear of him later.

The Jewish colonists engage in all kinds of trade both amongst one another and with the gentile population. They enjoy full legal rights. They hold and convey land. They act as scribes or lawyers. They sue and are sued in the courts. It is to be observed that they use Aramaic and not Hebrew. In fact there is not a single Hebrew document in all these collections with the very doubtful exception of a fragment of two lines. This is an extraordinarily cryptic and puzzling document, for strangely enough there is no division between the words. This in itself is a unique feature. It is particularly tantalising because it leaves the correct reading very obscure. The letters can be read so as to make sense either in Hebrew or Aramaic. In any reading the document bears a religious character. Its purport is that God will grant a complete recompense.¹

It is just possible then that Hebrew survived for religious use. But it is certain that Aramaic had completely supplanted it as a vehicle for everyday expression. This need not surprise us. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the East at this time. It was the language of diplomacy and was spoken all over the Persian Empire.

There is a remarkable confirmation of this from quite another source. Recently there have come to light in the ruins of Nippur a number of commercial records relating to the firm of Murasu and Sons. These are in Babylonian, being

¹ Sachau, Papyrus 42 ; Cowley, No. 58.

inscribed upon tablets of cuneiform. The interesting point is that the tablets have dockets scratched or sometimes written, not in Babylonian, but in Aramaic. Here is one for example: "Document of Enmastu-Uballit concerning 15 Kors of dates." The dates—in the other sense—cover the very period of the Assouan Papyri and the language and writing bear a strong resemblance. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that Aramaic was not confined in its use to the inhabitants of Palestine, but that at this period at any rate its use extended very widely over the East.

Earlier still you will remember that the Assyrians who attacked Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah spoke Aramaic. When the Assyrian envoy delivers his insulting message, he is asked to talk in Aramaic and not in Hebrew, so that the body of Jews should not understand. "Speak, I pray thee," says Eliakim to Rab-Shakeh, "to thy servants in the Aramaic language; for we understand it, and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall."

It is clear, therefore, that even at that time (700 B.C.) Aramaic was spoken both in Assyria and Judaea. But it was still the polite and educated language which had not yet permeated to the masses. By the fifth century B.C., it had, at least in Elephantine, completely supplanted Hebrew.

You will recollect that the diplomatic despatches preserved in the book of Ezra are in

Aramaic. It seemed somewhat strange that the Persian monarchs should employ this language in communicating with their subjects in Judaea. We have now found that this was, in fact, the ordinary medium of correspondence. And more than this: numerous expressions in the rescripts preserved in the Bible are found to have their counterpart in the documents which have been unearthed at Elephantine. Thus we find introductory expressions like this: "The health of your lordship may the God of Heaven seek after exceedingly at all times."

The title **בעל מעם** "secretary-chancellor" which occurs in the fourth chapter of Ezra, is met with in one of our documents. Even the appellation of Ezra himself, **סופר מהיר**, "a ready scribe" is found to be a term of general use. It is applied to Ahikar, the grand vizier of Sennacherib. Instances could be multiplied. It is enough to say that in language and form the public decrees and letters preserved in the Bible are cast in exactly the same mould as those which have now been discovered.

I have mentioned Ahikar. He was the hero of a romance of the East, which (as we shall see) had penetrated to Elephantine. The story is briefly this. Ahikar was a sage, a sort of Aesop, gifted with portentous learning and an amazing fecundity in the telling of fables and the coining of proverbs. He was the chief minister of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, and later of that monarch's son, Asarhaddon, whose complete confidence he enjoyed. Ahikar had one mis-

fortune. He had no son. To repair this calamity, as far as might be, he adopted a nephew, one Nadan. He brought him up on a copious course of his own fables—with disastrous results. When old age was upon him Ahikar decided to insinuate Nadan into the high office which he would himself have to relinquish. He therefore introduced him to Asarhaddon and succeeded in his scheme, the nephew, in due course, replacing the aged uncle. With amazing ingratitude Nadan proceeded to work for his benefactor's downfall. He accused him of treason to the king, who sentenced him to death. The order for execution was issued and an officer was sent to carry it out. By a stroke of good fortune, however, Ahikar recognised in the sheriff (if we may call him so) a man whom he had himself saved from death under somewhat similar circumstances. The officer is won over and covers up his dereliction of duty by secretly substituting the corpse of a criminal. This he palms off as the body of the ex-minister. After some years, Ahikar's loss is felt. The King of Egypt issues a defiant ultimatum to the King of Assyria, which is to be stayed only upon the resolution of an impossible conundrum. No one can find the solution and it is realised that only the genius of an Ahikar could have been equal to such a task. Thereupon the executioner divulges his well-meaning fraud. Ahikar is produced from hiding and, of course, resolves the riddle in a twinkling. The Egyptian monarch is perforce compelled to withdraw his threat and Ahikar is brought back to favour.

His nephew's plot is exposed and Nadan himself is delivered over to him for vengeance. He is punished by imprisonment and by having to listen to a further course of moral parables from his uncle designed to reform his character. This ordeal is, however, too severe and Nadan expires miserably.

The story was probably originally written in Babylonian. Arabic and Armenian versions are already known. Ahikar is actually referred to in the book of Tobit, whose relation he is there said to be. Now the documents at Elephantine include a large portion of the story written in Aramaic, no doubt a translation from the original. The history is complete up to the point where the officer reports falsely that he has executed Ahikar. There it breaks off. But another long fragment contains some of the moral maxims. I will instance a few. The translation is that of Cowley :

“Withhold not thy son from the rod, if thou canst not keep him from wickedness”

“A blow for a slave, rebuke for a maid, and for all thy servants discipline. . . .”

“The ass left his burden and would not carry it. He shall bear shame before his fellows and shall bear a burden which is not his, and shall be laden with a camel's load.”

“Two things are goodly and of three there is pleasure to Shamash : one who drinks wine and gives it to others ; he who hears a word and does not reveal it.”

“Soft is the speech of a king, but it is sharper and stronger than a two-edged knife.”

“I have tasted even the bitter sloe and the taste was strong, but there is nothing which is more bitter than poverty.”

“I have lifted sand and carried salt, but there is nothing which is heavier than debt.”

“I have lifted chaff and taken up bran, but there is nothing lighter than to be a sojourner.”

“Many are the stars of heaven whose name man knows not : so man knows not man.”

“Bend not thy bow and shoot not thine arrow at the righteous, lest God come to his help and turn it back upon thee.”

“Despise not that which is thy lot and covet not some great thing which is withheld from thee.”

“The bramble sent to the pomegranate saying, ‘Bramble to Pomegranate, what is the use of thy many thorns to him who touches thy fruit?’ The pomegranate answered and said to the bramble : ‘Thou art all thorns to him who touches thee.’”

These extracts will give you an idea of the concise and shrewd wisdom of Ahikar. The parallels with the book of Proverbs must have struck you, and there can be little doubt that Ben Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) must have been powerfully influenced by this work. It is of extraordinary interest to find that the book was so popular as to have provided the light reading for a Jewish community more than two thousand years ago.

A further piece of secular literature has also come to light. It is an Aramaic translation of an important historical document. About 510 B.C., Darius Hystaspes had engraved at Behistun, about twenty miles from Kermanshah, on the caravan road between Babylon and Persia, in the rock about 500 feet from the road, an inscription in three languages describing how he had conducted his numerous campaigns against insurrectionary forces in his Empire. These languages were Persian, Median (or Susian) and Cuneiform. One version supplied a key to another and it was in this investigation that General Rawlinson won his laurels. King Darius appears to have attached enormous weight to the publicity of this inscription. The reason is not far to seek. For it described in detail the punishments which he had meted out to those who had dared to dispute his authority. He desired his other subjects to take warning by example. In fact, his motive was exactly that of a railway company which placards notices of the convictions of passengers who have travelled on its line without paying for a ticket. Putting it baldly, he wanted to advertise his power to crush a rebellion. And so he had this inscription carved in three languages. For this reason, too, it appears that he had official copies of the inscription circulated in appropriate translations throughout his empire. To Elephantine there found its way an Aramaic translation, and this is the document which has now come to light.

You will, however, be more interested in the purely Jewish side of the life of our colony. Their religion centred round their temple, which, as I have told you, was situated in the Royal Street. It was a substantial stone building and contained an altar upon which burnt offerings were sacrificed. Meal-offerings were also customary, as was the burning of incense. There were priests (כהניא), but no mention is made of Levites. The existence of a sacrificial altar out of Jerusalem has puzzled many scholars, since it seemed to be a violation of the Deuteronomic prohibition. Though there is reason, as we shall see, for thinking that it was not entirely approved in Jerusalem, yet it may not have been thought to come under the strict ban of the Law which may have been regarded as applying to Palestine only, and not to foreign countries. Of course this temple may not have been altogether an orthodox institution, but it cannot have constituted any outrageous violation of accepted principle, as otherwise the colony would never have applied to the heads of the community of Jerusalem to help them to get it rebuilt. And this appeal we shall find they actually made.

Be that as it may, the temple dated from before the conquest by the Persians in 525 B.C. The Jews were very proud of it. On the other hand the Egyptians were without a sanctuary. The temple of Chnub had been destroyed by Cambyses and the votaries of that deity were shrineless. It is no wonder, therefore, that inflammable

material existed here which could easily be ignited. And so it proved. A movement for Jewish religious revival, under one Hanani, seems to have made things worse. There were plots and ominous murmurs. Taking advantage of the absence of the satrap Arsames at Susa, the Persian capital, the priests of Chnub bribed Widarnag and his son to organise an attack on the Jews. The attack was made in the year 410 B.C., and the temple was burnt to ashes. The disaster was a terrible one for the community. They were plunged into despair and fasted and prayed. And retribution came. For the detested Widarnag met a violent death, though by what means we do not know. This, however, did not rebuild the temple, and the Jews tried every possible means to bring about this end. Amongst other steps which they took, they appealed to Palestine. They wrote to the Persian Governor of Judaea, one Bagoas (known to us also from Josephus),¹ and to the high priest Jehochanan or John, whom we meet in the book of Nehemiah, and also to the chiefs of the community. The appeal, however, went unanswered. Very likely there were mixed feelings on the subject at Jerusalem. Very probably a section objected altogether to the notion of assisting in the restoration of this foreign temple. Others must have looked askance at the heathenish notions by which the Judaism of the colony was tainted.

Two years later the colony tried another manoeuvre. They wrote again to Bagoas, but

¹ See *ante* p 54.

this time they ignored the religious community of Judaea. Instead they addressed themselves to the rival province of the North. The notorious Sanballat was still governor of Samaria, but apparently he had delegated his power to his two sons. To these the Jews of Elephantine turned for their good offices. But let the letter speak for itself. Fortunately the draft or office-copy has been preserved; we actually have it in duplicate. Let me read it to you:—

“To our lord Bagoas, governor of Judaea, thy servants Jedonjah and his fellows the priests at the fortress of Yeb. May the God of heaven confirm the peace of our lord greatly for all time and set you in favour before King Darius and the sons of his house, even a thousand more than now and accord you long life, and be happy and full of health for all time. Now thy servant Jedonjah and his fellows speak to you thus:

“In the month of Tammuz, in the fourteenth year of King Darius (that is 410 B.C.), when Arsames had left and presented himself to the king, the priests of the God Chnub, living in the fortress of Yeb, in league with Widarnag, who was commander here, set about to destroy the temple of the God JHO, which is in the fortress of Yeb. After which this cursed Widarnag sent a letter to his son Naphajan, who was chief of the army in the fortress of Sun, saying: ‘Let the temple which is in the fortress of Yeb be destroyed.’ After which Naphajan took under him Egyptians and other troops. They arrived

at the fortress of Yeb with their engines, entered the temple and razed it to the ground. And they destroyed the stone columns which were there. Also the five gates, built in blocks of squared stone, with which this temple was furnished, they destroyed. And they overthrew the doors (and the hinges of these doors were of brass) and the entire roof, built of cedar-beams, together with the rest of the building, and the other things that were there, they destroyed with fire. And the vessels for sprinkling of gold and silver and the things in this temple, all these they took and seized for themselves.

“ Now since the days of the kings of Egypt, our fathers built this temple in the fortress of Yeb, and when Cambyzes came into Egypt he found this temple built. And the temples of the gods of Egypt were all destroyed, but no one harmed aught that was in this temple.

“ And after they had acted after this manner, we and our wives and children clothed ourselves in sackcloth and fasted and prayed to JHO, the God of Heaven, who gave us this Widarnag to look upon. The dogs pulled out the tendons of his feet and all the treasures which he had acquired for himself perished ; and all the men who had woven evil against this temple, all were killed and we had them to look upon.

“ Aforetime already, at the time when this disaster came upon us, we sent a letter to our lord and to Jehochanan the high priest and his colleagues, the priests of Jerusalem, and to Awstan the brother of Anani, and to the other

notables of the Jews. They never sent us any letters.

“Meanwhile, since the month of Tammuz, in the fourteenth year of King Darius, to the present day, we are clothed in sackcloth and we fast. Our wives are become as of widows and we do not anoint ourselves with oil nor do we drink wine. Also, since that time, to this day in the seventeenth year of King Darius, oblation and incense and whole-burnt offering have not been offered in this temple.

“Now thy servants Jedonjah and his fellows the Jews, all the people of Yeb, say thus: ‘If it seem good to our lord concerning this temple that it be rebuilt—since we are not permitted to rebuild it—it is well. Then to us, the favoured of thy goodness and benevolence here in Egypt, be sent a letter from you touching the temple of the God JHO, that it be rebuilt in the fortress of Yeb as aforetime and that oblation (מנחתא) and incense and whole-burnt offering be offered upon the altar of the God JHO in thy name. And we will pray for thee at all times, we and our wives and children and all the Jews who are here. If thou doest thus, so that this temple be rebuilt, a reward will come to you before JHO, the God of heaven, greater than to him who offers to Him whole-burnt offerings and sacrifices worth a thousand talents of silver. As to the matter we have instructed our messenger thereon.

“In addition we have in a letter informed Delajah and Selemjah, the sons of Sin-uballit, the governor of Samaria, of everything in our

name. Further, of all these things committed against us, Arsames has had no knowledge.

“The 20th of Marcheshvan, in the seventeenth year of King Darius.”¹

Apparently the object of this letter was to obtain a written recommendation from the authorities of Samaria and Judaea which could be used to influence the Egyptian satrap. You will have noticed that the post-script is careful to acquit that official of all blame in the matter.

This long letter, however, was never answered. The bearer, nevertheless, was not altogether unsuccessful, for he succeeded in conveying it to Bagoas and to one of the sons of San-uballit, or (as we know him better) Sanballat. The question apparently presented difficulties and was so delicate that the recipients would not commit themselves to a written answer. Possibly they feared to estrange the unpropitious section of the Jewish population in Palestine. They contented themselves with a verbal reply. The envoy, however, was a business-like person and he did his best to rectify the omission by immediately reducing the interview to a memorandum in writing. This document has also survived:—

“Memorandum from Bagoas and Delajah. They said to me: ‘Let it be an instruction to you in Egypt to say to Arsames about the altar-house of the God of Heaven which was built in the fortress of Yeb formerly before Cambyes, which Widarnag, that reprobate, destroyed in

¹ Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus*, Leipzig, 1911. Papyrus I. See Cowley, No. 30.

the fourteenth year of Darius the King, to rebuild it on its place as it was before and that they may offer the meal-offering and incense upon that altar as formerly was done.' ”¹

The sting of the message is in its omission. Meal-offerings are specifically mentioned, but no word is said about animal sacrifices. In fact the authorities in Palestine had decided upon a compromise. They had been induced to support the restoration of the temple, but with this significant limitation. In another fragment, unfortunately very mutilated, we find this limitation expressly accepted. The letter is in the handwriting of the same envoy who went on the mission to Palestine. To whom he wrote we do not know. Possibly it was to Bagoas again. He explicitly abandons the request for the re-introduction of the sacrifices of goats or doves and stipulates only for permission to introduce incense and meal-offerings. A heavy reward is promised if the scheme goes through. But whether it did and whether the sacred building was again erected, we do not know. The indications are against it.

As to religious observances at Elephantine we know little. No express mention is made of the Sabbath, but the name “Sabbatai” occurs, and it could only have been given to a child born on the Sabbath. One ray of light has, however, penetrated to us. It concerns the Passover. In the year 419 B.C., one Hananiah addresses the chiefs of the community at Elephantine,

¹ Cowley, No. 32. See Sachau, Papyrus 3.

whom he describes as his brethren. After some reference to a royal proclamation made to the satrap Arsames, he enjoins the community thus :¹ "You must count as follows. . . . From the 15th to the 21st you must keep yourselves pure and take heed." Then follows a prohibition against work and the drinking of fermented liquor—no doubt the eschewing of leavened bread was mentioned in one of the many gaps in this papyrus—"from sunset to the 21st." The community are also told to go into their houses and to seal themselves up between days. The expression bears a striking resemblance to the *עצרת* or "shutting-up" of the Pentateuch.

Who was this Hananiah who delivered this encyclical so authoritatively ? Obviously he was a very active individual, a religious enthusiast who knew how to pull political strings. We are not surprised to find that he made enemies, and in another document we find a Jew of Elephantine complaining in malicious terms of all the trouble that has rested upon them since Hananiah came to Egypt. Is it not possible that he is the same as Hananiah who is mentioned by Nehemiah as one of his right-hand men ? He is referred to as the *שר הבירה*, the chief of the capital, and Nehemiah goes out of his way to say that he was a faithful man and God-fearing above many.² If this identification be correct, we shall have established yet another link between the papyri and the Bible itself.

¹ Sachau, Papyrus 6; see Cowley, No. 21.

² *Neb.* vii. 2.

So far we have seen the colonists at Elephantine as earnest and even religious Jews. Many of their names, too, have a religious connotation, e.g., Jehochan, Jehonathan, Jehoshama, Jedoniah, Jezaniah. Their temple is spoken of as that of JHO, for unlike the Judaeans they had not yet learnt to avoid using a personal name for the Deity. But there is another side to the picture. Inter-marriage, we have seen already, existed. Worse still, we are startled to find that Canaanitish deities are still held in regard, at least by a section of the people. Names occur such as Bethelakab (*Bethel* bestowed), son of Ezer, or again, Bethelnathan (*Bethel* gave) or Haramnathan (meaning *Haram* gave). The climax is reached when we find a long list of contributors to a fund for the God JHO, the subscription being two shekels per head. The treasurer subjoins his account. After writing down the totals he allocates it between JHO, Ashambethel and Anathbethel.

Asham and *Anath* are both known to us from the Bible. *Ashima* is mentioned as a false deity in the second book of Kings: "The men of Hamath made Ashima."¹ Amos too² inveighs against those "that swear by the Ashima of Samaria." As to *Anath*, Anammelek, i.e., Anath-Melek, is mentioned in the same passage of the Book of Kings as a deity to whom children were sacrificed. Anath has been identified also with the Syrian goddess Anathi. *Bethel*, though

¹ II Kings xvii. 30.

² Amos viii. 14.

originally the name of a shrine in Judaea, had become personified as a deity. We can now understand Jeremiah when he said: "Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence."¹

The extraordinary feature is the pliancy with which the colonists turned from deity to deity. Thus father and son are sometimes called after different god-heads. For example, we find such names as Haramnathan bar Bethelnathan, or again, Bethelnathan bar Jehonathan. Even more than this: in a document between two Jews, on the subject of the ownership of half an ass, an oath is taken by JHO the God, by the temple, and by Anathjaho.

What are we to think of the condition of such a people? Merely to call them irreligious would be inaccurate. Obviously this was not the case, and they would probably have been shocked at the notion; for we have seen how utterly prostrated they were at the destruction of their temple. But the fact remains that their outlook was very different from the pure monotheism of the prophets.

It is small wonder that we find Jeremiah² fiercely denouncing the foreign cults of the settlers in Egypt. And they give him the very answer we should expect of them. They say that they are merely going back to the good old days of their fathers who practised the same rites in Jerusalem under the Kings of Judah.

¹ *Jeremiah* xlviii. 13.

² *Jeremiah* xlv.

The important feature for us is that we see in Elephantine a reflection of the religious position obtaining only a century or two earlier in the motherland. The settlers have not become assimilated. On the contrary they have reverted to type.

It is interesting to compare their condition with that of other Jewish exiles of the same period. We know something of the Jews in Nippur, through the contract-tablets of which I have already spoken. They are dated, and the period proves to be exactly the same as that covered by the Assouan papyri. The evidence is furnished almost entirely by the Jewish names with which we meet. Yet out of this seemingly scanty material, Dr. Samuel Daiches has been able to construct a very substantial structure. It is true that names occur compounded with Babylonian deities such as Shamash or Bēl. Yet these were probably the half-unconscious effects of environment. The exiles were merely copying the names of their neighbours.¹ But the names as a whole show a strong Jewish feeling and there is not the faintest vestige left of any veneration for the old Canaanitish deities. What can be the reason for this extraordinary difference in the religious outlook of these two communities? Conceivably they may have developed differently in their different surroundings. But it seems much more likely that the divergence is due to the different times at which they migrated from Judah. The ancestors of the Jews of Nippur

¹ Cf. such names as Mordecai or Isidore.

were exiled soon after 600 B.C. If the colony of Elephantine was founded by Psammetichus I, it would have left Palestine from ten to sixty years earlier. Had there then been any great movement, any far-reaching change in the religion of Judah during those years? The answer is beyond a doubt. It was in this very period that Josiah introduced his reforms, that the book of the Law was discovered and that Jeremiah commenced his prophetic mission. The two communities then show us the impress of two stages, the "before" and the "after" of the great religious revival in Judah.

What was the later history of the colony? We do not know. One sinister fragment, however, seems to point to a disaster, no less than a pogrom. The fragment commences with the ominous word "Chnum." Then follows a list of women who were taken captive. The document continues:

"Behold the names of the men who were found in different gates and were killed."¹

There follows another list headed by Jedonjah bar Gemariah, the chief man of the community. There is a mention of plundering, and the letter concludes by assuring the recipient that his family, at least, are safe.

The community may have been massacred. It may have become assimilated. There is yet an alternative. It may have migrated. There are even authorities who believe that to this and other Egyptian colonies is to be traced the

¹ Sachau, Papyrus 15. See Cowley, No. 34.

origin of the Falasha Jews of Abyssinia, whose source has been a topic of so much speculation. We cannot tell, but at least we can be grateful to the little settlement of the Nile-island for the wonderful light that they have shed upon a momentous epoch in Bible times.

THE GROWTH OF THE DOCTRINE
OF
IMMORTALITY AMONG THE JEWS.

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THE GROWTH OF THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY AMONG THE JEWS

THE subject with which I have been asked to deal is one which, to me at any rate, it is peculiarly difficult to compress within the space of one short lecture. I dealt with it some years ago in a course of four lectures, given at Durham, which were published in book-form under the title "Israel's Hope of Immortality." All that I there said appears to me to be essential to the subject ; and such changes as I should be disposed to make, after the lapse of years, would be mainly in the direction of addition and expansion. It is, therefore, for me, a hard matter to contract and abbreviate the presentation of the subject which I have already put forward. I feel that, in attempting to do so, I am in danger of neglecting essentials ; and I am keenly conscious that my hearers may find gaps in my treatment of the subject which they might naturally have expected to be filled. I must, therefore, plead for a lenient judgment in recognition of the fact that all aspects of this great subject cannot be compressed within the space of a short lecture and I must be considered to have behind me the book to which I have already alluded, in which the question will be found to be treated under

somewhat wider aspects than it is possible to treat it here and now.

At the outset, it is necessary to remark that, in a very brief historical survey, such as I am attempting, the method of interpretation which I adopt is (if I may borrow the terminology of the Jewish commentators) the *Peshāt* and not the *Derāsh*. What we are seeking to gather is the simple or primary meaning of statements bearing on our subject, as they represent the mind of the Jewish writers who put them forth. The fact that this is our aim in no way implies any minimising of the truth that such statements may be found to be susceptible of a deeper meaning when read in the light of fuller revelation. As must be recognised by Jews and Christians alike, it belongs to the permanent moral value and beauty of the Old Testament that its writers are constantly found to have builded better than they knew. Thus, when Jesus Christ deduces the doctrine of a future life from the words of God to Moses at Sinai, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," since God is not the God of dead men, but of the living, He is adopting a method of exegesis, which goes beyond *Peshāt*, or simple and literal exposition, and belongs to *Derāsh* or mystical exposition; yet the argument is seen, in the light of later Biblical revelation, to be abundantly justified, and it put the Sadducees to silence. We, however, are at present attempting to investigate the *growth* of the doctrine of immortality among the Jews; and

in so doing, it is necessary to confine ourselves to *Peshāt* or literal interpretation of passages—the sense which appears to have been intended consciously by their writers, and not to go beyond this and read into them a fuller meaning which, however legitimately found to be existent in the germ, can hardly be said to lie upon the surface. Such a limitation is imposed upon us if we are properly to follow out the historical method.

I assume that all Jewish students of the Bible will, at the present stage of thought, be prepared to admit that there is such a Divinely ordered *development* in revelation as is implied by the title of my lecture. The fact that such a progress in the realisation of spiritual truth belongs to the Divine scheme is, indeed, inherent in the meaning of the Tetragrammaton as explained in the grand description of the Prophecy of Moses. *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, “I will become what I will become,” marks out the God of Israel as pre-eminently *the God of progressive revelation*. He is not a God who has given His people a single revelation of Divine truth, and then retired from them and left them to work out their religious history upon this basis. Such a revelation might have formed a document akin to the last will and testament of a dead man ; but He is above everything *the living God*, ever working, ever energising and directing His people through the influence of His Divine Spirit. “Behold, I will send mine Angel before thee to keep thee in the way wherein thou shalt go !” What

does that mean but the bestowal of fresh guidance as need arises, the leading on from stage to stage, in fact a progress in revelation ever adapting itself to fresh conditions ?

Again, " When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." The chosen nation passed through an infantile stage ; and for all children the rudiments of knowledge are much the same, in accordance with their limited capabilities. Whatever he may be destined to become, scholar, thinker, statesman, divine, the child at first shares a simple form of education in common with others of his class who are not designed to fill any high position in the world of thought. It is only later on, as his special aptitude reveals itself, that he is advanced to higher things and a differentiation begins.

So it was with Israel in the Divine scheme. At first he shared, with other peoples of the same Semitic stock, a rudimentary training which was, in its main features, common to all ; and it was only gradually that he was taught to climb on stepping stones of his dead self to higher things.

As regards the special doctrine which we are to-day considering, development in religious thought appeared to have been slow. Speaking generally, in the light of such knowledge as we possess, it may be said that the doctrine of immortality finds no place in the religious thought of Israel prior to the Exile. Certain

ideas were current as to the state after death and the abode of the dead ; but these belong to the common back-ground of Semitic belief, and have nothing to do with Israel's religion, the religion of Yahweh.

Among the Semites the abode of the departed was regarded as an underworld, that is, it was located beneath the earth ; the conception of the earth being that of a more or less flat surface of land, surrounded by the sea and resting ultimately upon the watery abyss. The derivation of the Hebrew name *She'ol* which is applied to the underworld is unknown. Among the Babylonians the name employed was the Sumerian *KI-GAL*, that is, "the great land," the form which in Neo-Sumerian naturally became *SHI-WAL*, and it has been suggested with some plausibility that *She'ol* may be a modified equivalent of the Sumerian title.

In any case the Hebrew and Babylonian conceptions of the character of the place are essentially identical. The Hebrew conception may aptly be illustrated from a passage in Job (x. 21, 22) where the underworld is described as :—

" A land of darkness and deep shade ;
A land of gloom, like black darkness itself ;
Deep shade without any order,
And where the light is like black darkness."

The inhabitants of *She'ol* are spoken of as *Rephā'im*, a term which is evidently to be connected with the Babylonian verb *abûr* or *rapû*

“to sink down” (applied for example to the heavenly bodies as sinking down to the underworld).¹

The existence of these “ghosts” or “shades” in the underworld is most vividly portrayed in a passage in the “Taunt-Song” against the king of Babylon in Isaiah xiv, where the fate of the king after death is brought into salient contrast with his proud anticipation of a future exaltation to the circle of the gods.

She’ol was pictured as “the house of meeting for all living” (Job xxx. 23), good and bad without distinction finding their abode there.

“There the wicked cease from raging,
And the weary are at rest,
There the prisoners are at ease together,
They hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
The small and the great are there ;
And the servant is free from his master.

Job iii. 17-19.

The same conception of the underworld was current among the Babylonians. They pictured it as :—

“The gloomy house, the dwelling of the god Irkallon ;
The house from which those who enter go not forth ;
The road whose way is without return ;
The house whose enterers are deprived of light ;
Dust is their sustenance, their food is clay ;
Light they see not ; in darkness they dwell ;
They are clad like birds with a garb of wings ;
Upon the door and its bolts there lies dust.”²

¹ Compare the use of the Hebrew verb in *Judges* xix. 9 : “Behold the day hath declined (*rāphā*, literally ‘sink down’) towards setting.”

² From the poem of *Ishtar’s Descent into the Underworld*.

We should gain no clear results were we to spend time in considering the relation conceived by the Hebrews as existing between body and soul or spirit. It is clear that She'ol is distinguished from the grave. The body rests in the grave, or is ignominiously cast forth; the shade in any case is doomed to existence in She'ol. The shade, however, though disembodied, has a semblance of its former self by which it is recognisable. This we may gather from the passage in Isaiah xiv, to which I have referred, picturing the descent of the king of Babylon into She'ol. It is also clear from the narrative of Saul's visit to the witch of Endor, where the shade of Samuel, when raised, appears as "an old man . . . covered with a garment," (I Samuel xxviii. 14). That some kind of relationship was conceived as existing between the dead body (buried or otherwise) and the shade in She'ol is probable. Burial in the family tomb, the being gathered to one's fathers, was desired as the final boon, and the carrying out of a father's wishes in this request was the filial duty of his descendants. On the other hand, to be cast out unburied was the worst indignity that could be suffered: witness again the Taunt-Song against the king of Babylon and Jeremiah's prophecy against Jehoiakim, king of Judah (Jer. xxii. 19). A remarkable passage in Job xiv. 21-22 speaks of the dead man as though in She'ol he were dimly conscious of the gnawing pains of body's corruption in the grave, though oblivious of all that goes

on in the world from which he has been severed.

“ His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not,
And they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them.
Only his flesh upon him hath pain,
And his soul upon him mourneth.”

Here, again, I may cite a Babylonian parallel as illustrating the conception that life in the underworld is the mere shadow of existence, deprived of all hope of a brighter dawn, yet there may be degrees of alleviation, dependant upon the treatment which the corpse has received and the devotion of surviving relations.

At the end of the twelfth and last tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, Gilgamesh, the Babylonian national hero, disappointed and baulked in his search after immortality, succeeds in calling up the ghost of his dead friend Engiden, and in entering into conversation with him. The passage, as it survives, is, unfortunately, somewhat fragmentary, but we are able to gather its general drift.

“ ‘ Speak, my friend, speak,’ exclaims Gilgamesh,
‘ Tell me the law of the land which thou hast seen.’
‘ I will not tell thee, my friend,’ replies the ghost ;
‘ If I were to tell thee, thou wouldst sit down and weep.’ ”

Gilgamesh does, however, succeed in eliciting certain information as to the lot of different classes of the dead.

“ ‘ Him who . . . hast thou seen ? ’ ‘ Yes, I have seen him ;
On a couch he reclines, and drinks pure water.’
‘ Him who was slain in battle hast thou seen ? ’ ‘ Yes, I
have seen him ;

His father and mother support his head and his wife is beside him.'

'Him whose corpse is cast out upon the field hast thou seen?'

'Yes, I have seen him;

His shade has no repose in the land.'

'Him whose shade has no one to care for it hast thou seen?'

'Yes, I have seen him;

He eats the off-scourings of the pot, the refuse of food which is cast into the streets.'"

The reference to care for the shades of the departed points to a cult of the dead, of which it is possible that traces are also to be found in early Israel, just as there are also very clear traces of the practice of necromancy; though this was banned under prophetic influence as alien to the true religion. Enquiry into this subject would take us too far afield for our present purpose.

The views commonly held by Israel as to the state after death being such as I have outlined, it may be understood that the outlook upon the unknown future was dreary in the extreme. As we have already observed, this future state, as thus conceived, was entirely unconnected with the religion of Yahweh. It was this that caused the keenest poignancy of despair to pious souls to whom in the present their relationship to Yahweh meant much. Thus, in Hezekiah's poem, after his recovery from mortal sickness, we find the words:—

"For She'ol cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee,
They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy faithful-
ness.

The living, the living, he shall praise Thee as I do this day."

Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19.

Or again, we find a Psalmist exclaiming :—

“ For in death there is no resemblance of Thee ;
In She’ol who shall give Thee thanks ? ”

Psalm vi. 5.

“ The dead praise not Yahweh.”

Says another poet,

“ Neither all they that go down into silence.”

Psalm cxv. 17

While yet another, in his despondency, describes himself as,

“ Cut off among the dead.
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom Thou rememberest no more,
And they are cut off from Thy hand.”

Psalm lxxxviii. 5.

The same poet exclaims later on :—

“ Wilt Thou show wonders for the dead ?
Or shall the shades arise and give Thee thanks ?
Shall Thy kindness be told in the grave ?
Thy faithfulness in the place of destruction ?
Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark ?
And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ? ”

Passages such as these remind us forcibly of the Greek conception of the joyless condition of existence after death, as voiced by the shade of Achilles :—

βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἔων θητευέμεν ἄλλω,
ἄνδρ' ἢ παρ' ἄκλήρῳ, ᾧ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἴη,
ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.

Od. xi. 489-491.

“ Rather I'd choose laboriously to bear,
A weight of woes, and breathe the vital air,
A slave to some poor hind that toils for bread,
Than reign the sceptred monarch of the dead.”

If we now enquire the reason of the failure of early Yahweh religion to extend beyond the present life and to illuminate the gloom of the future state, we shall find it, no doubt, in the fact that, prior to the period of the earliest writing prophets, that is the eighth century B.C., the old-time conception of Yahweh was strictly that of a national God. Yahweh-worship, at this stage, is best described as *monolatry* rather than *monotheism*. Yahweh was Israel's only God, and the obligation to worship Him and Him only was clear to His faithful adherents ; but this did not hinder the belief that other nations might in like manner have *their own* national deities who had as real an existence as had Yahweh, though Israel was bound to these extraneous deities by no tie and owed them no sort of allegiance. The conception of the state for Israel, as for their neighbours, was *theocratic*, that is the national God was regarded as *King* of His people, the earthly king as vicegerent of the national God. When war was carried on, it was waged against the God of the hostile nation, quite as much as against the nation itself and its human monarch, and the national God was leader of His forces to battle against the Deity of the opposing army. Thus we find that Israel's national Deity, Yahweh, is particularly associated with the battlefield.

He is Yahweh Sebba'oth, the God of armies, to whom is due success in battle. It is in accordance with this conception that we find that the call to arms was constantly the occasion for the revival of the national spirit of allegiance to Yahweh, after periods of religious decadence.

Further, the fact is closely bound up with this conception of Yahweh as national Deity that the nation and not the individual was regarded as the religious unit. The relation between Yahweh and Israel was pictured under the form of a covenant, and to this covenant the parties were Yahweh on the one side and the nation on the other. The idea that the covenant-relationship existed between the Deity and individual Israelites as such seems to have been foreign to the religious conception so long as the view maintained that Yahweh was strictly the national Deity only. It is true that, at its foundation, Yahweh's covenant was pictured as concluded with individuals, in the persons of Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But these figures were idealized as the founders of the nation, and represented to later thought the religious unit of the nation as a party to the covenant. Indeed, the fact that the covenant was believed to have been once for all concluded by Yahweh with Israel's righteous ancestors tended to emphasize the conception that it was a national covenant and to minimize the rights of the individual. Framed once for all with Abraham as the religious unit upon the human side, the covenant was independent of infringe-

ment upon the part of individual members of the nation in later times. Such infringement involved the cutting off of the sinner from the nation and from the rights of the covenant, but it could not in any way abrogate the covenant itself. However great and widespread might be the growth of apostasy and the failure to live up to the covenant-terms at any particular age, yet it never could become universal. There always must be found a righteous nucleus within the nation which held fast to the terms of relationship with Yahweh, the "seven thousand in Israel, every knee which has not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which has not kissed him," and this righteous nucleus was the true Israel, the true nation with whom the covenant stood fast. Had this not been the case, that is, had apostasy ever become so universal as to have embraced the whole nation and to have involved the abrogation of the national covenant with Yahweh, then Yahweh would have proved Himself unfaithful to the covenant made once for all with faithful Abraham, a contingency in itself impossible and utterly to be repudiated as such by the national conscience.

I have dealt at some length with this conception of the nation as the religious unit because it seems to me that, when apprehended, it explains much in connection with our subject which might otherwise remain obscure. The nation, as such, did not die, and therefore there was no question of the Divine covenant being annulled by death. The individual as such had no rights

within the covenant ; he was only a member of his clan which was a portion of the nation, and so he shared indirectly in the blessings of the national covenant so long as he continued to live up to its enactments. But the idea of individualism was always at this period merged in collectivism. There was nothing repugnant to the religious conscience of the time that Yahweh should "visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Achan might, by his trespass, involve the destruction of his whole family ; and Divine justice, so far from being impugned by the event, was in fact regarded as vindicated by it.

We gather that the religious ideal of early times, great and lofty as it was in its assertion of the indestructibility of the Divine covenant with Israel, and capable of almost indefinite development in the hands of the later prophets, was at this stage very partial and one-sided ; and, concentrating itself upon the nation, it had little to offer to the individual. If in this life he had no standing in relation to Yahweh in virtue of his distinct personality, what could he expect to possess in the state after death, to which, according to the conception of the time, Yahweh's activities were not extended ?

It would, however, probably be a mistake to imagine that because, at the stage with which we are dealing, Israel's religion had nothing to offer to the individual in the way of a hope of future life beyond the grave, therefore there

was complete acquiescence in this blank prospect, and men's minds never rose in aspiration to anything higher. There are a few passages in writings of a comparatively early date which may be said to contain the rudiments of a doctrine of immortality, in so far as they picture the possibility of immortality as presenting itself to the mind of the writers. Such is the reference in Gen. iii. 22 (the narrative of the Fall by the prophetic writer) to the tree of life which grew in Eden, whereof if man's first parents had eaten they might have lived for ever. Just the same conception occurs in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh, in search of immortality, wins his way with great difficulty to the abode of Uta-napishtim, a man who, once human, has been raised by the gods to a place among the immortals, and who therefore may be expected to possess the secret of immortality, and perchance may be prevailed upon to transmit it. Uta-napishtim relates to Gilgamesh his strange story, which is the Babylonian counterpart of the Hebrew flood-narrative (Uta-napishtim corresponding to Noah), and finally explains how that, after his escape from the flood in the ship which he had built, he was raised to immortality by the gods together with his wife, and made to dwell "afar off, at the confluence of the streams." The best that he can do for Gilgamesh is to direct him to search for a magic herb, called *shibu issahir amelu*, that is, "(When) old a man becomes young." Those who eat of this herb will attain immortality. Gilgamesh is fortunate

enough to find and pluck this herb ; but shortly afterwards, while he is bathing a serpent snatches it away, and he loses for ever the chance of immortality which has actually come within his grasp. Both this story and the Hebrew story illustrate the fact that there existed early speculations as to man's failure to obtain the immortality which was the lot of the gods.

We may notice also, in the earlier literature of Israel, the legends of the translations of Enoch and Elijah, individual cases in which men were believed to have escaped death and to have been raised to the society of God. There was not, however, (so far as we have evidence) any argument from the particular to the general. Enoch (who probably corresponds to the Babylonian Enmeduranki, a Sumerian name meaning "the lord who unites heaven and earth") was, like Uta-napishtim, a mysterious personage who, on account of his piety, had been raised above the common lot of humanity. Such beliefs as are herein implied were far removed from any hope of a brighter future as the lot of ordinary humanity.

We now have to notice the main factors which brought about a break-up in old conceptions and a fuller and higher development of religious thought in regard to the subject with which we are dealing.

The most important of these was the rise and development of the doctrine of *Monotheism* in the eighth century B.C. Yahweh, hitherto the

national God of Israel, becomes henceforth the God of the whole earth. The national gods of the nations around are seen to be no gods, mere idols, the work of men's hands.

When we associate the doctrine of Yahweh as the only God of the whole earth with the activity of the writing prophets of the middle and later part of the eighth century B.C., it does not follow that such a conception was hitherto altogether unthought of by higher minds in Israel. The prophetic narrative of the Creation (Gen. ii. 4 ff., part of the document which we distinguish by the symbol J) pictures Yahweh-Elohim as the Creator of the world; and the date of this narrative, even in its present form, is doubtless to be carried back considerably earlier than the middle of the eighth century. Again, the conception of a covenant between Yahweh and His people, which we find in the earlier documents, or in the later, implies on Yahweh's part an act of free choice which, pressed to its logical conclusion, at once places Him in a position different from that of a merely national God. Still, such a conception does not appear at an earlier stage to have influenced religious thought in general. When Amos propounded his doctrine that Yahweh had relations with other nations, and would judge them and Israel alike in accordance with their observance of a common standard of morality, his teaching must have fallen as an entirely new conception upon the minds of those to whom it was presented. *They* thought that because Yahweh was their

national God He must be ready in the long run to favour and maintain His people in spite of moral laxity and a merely formal standard of religion ; but the prophet argued that special privilege involved special responsibility, and that failure to discharge this debt would bring punishment even so severe as the destruction of the offenders :—

“ You only have I known of all the families of the earth,
Therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities.”

Amos iii. 2.

The doctrine that Yahweh was no mere national God, but the only God, as developed by Amos, carried with it the truth that He was the Maker and Sustainer of the world, and the one Supreme Arbiter of men's thoughts and deeds. No part of the universe was beyond the reach of His hand, and so none could escape His power. “ Though they dig into She'ol, thence shall My hand take them ; and though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence ; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them ” (Am. ix. 3).

Isaiah, some few years later than Amos, carries on the same monotheistic teaching in the Southern Kingdom. The majesty and holiness of Yahweh form the themes upon which he works ; and his favourite title for Yahweh is “ The Holy One of Israel.” Speaking of the day of Yahweh

Sebba'oth, that is the day of His vengeance upon all that is repugnant to His Holiness, he tells his hearers that "Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day. And the not-gods shall utterly pass away" (Isa. ii. 17, 18). The Assyrian, though he knows it not, is merely a rod in Yahweh's hand for the execution of His vengeance upon the nations; and he in turn must suffer punishment for the haughty insolence with which he magnifies himself against Yahweh (Isa. x. 5 ff.).

We may regard the establishment of the doctrine of monotheism as the first great advance in the direction of a higher conception of the future state. If Yahweh is supreme Deity of the universe, then She'ol also must be found to come within the range of His hand, and its inhabitants need not be regarded as outside His care. These are influences which now first emerge as possibilities; though, as we shall see, they do not appear to have been worked out to their conclusion until a long subsequent age.

The second important factor towards an advance in thought was the decline and fall of the Judean kingdom in the early part of the sixth century B.C. The decay and destruction of the *nation* brought into prominence Yahweh's relation to the *individual*. At this period the great religious teacher was the prophet Jeremiah; and he may be regarded as the founder of the doctrine of religious individualism.

Jeremiah laboured under no misapprehension

as to the fall of the Judean Kingdom. He clearly foresaw that its downfall and destruction were inevitable, and all his counsels made for unconditional surrender to the Chaldean; a line of advice which brought down upon him the charge of disaffection, and rendered him so unpopular in Jerusalem that his life was more than once in grave danger.

Like the prophets who preceded him, Jeremiah looked forward to the establishment in the future of an ideal Messianic Kingdom, after the chastisement so nearly impending had done its work, and the iniquity of the people had been purged away. But the moral regeneration of the people must come about through the realisation of the moral responsibility of the individual. The old idea, under which, as we have seen, the nation, not the individual, was the unit, had been tersely expressed in the popular proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. xxxi. 29). This proverb summed up the view of Divine justice which conceived the sin of the father to be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, a view which, with our knowledge of heredity and other social factors, we see to have a one-sided approximation to truth, but the glaring injustice of which as an inexorable law must tend to come into prominence so soon as the responsibility and rights of the individual begin to be realized. And the employment of the proverb itself suggests that the sense of injustice had begun to assert itself in the popular mind.

In the future, says Jeremiah, this proverb shall no more be used: "But everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."

And then follows the magnificent conception of the new covenant, not like the former covenant with the nation at large which was graven on tables of stone, but written upon the hearts of its individual recipients.

The truth of individual responsibility, thus enunciated, was not allowed to fall to the ground. Ezekiel was one of the captives who had been carried into Babylonia with Jehoiachim in 597 B.C. He received his prophetic call in the fifth year of the captivity of Jehoiachim (592 B.C.), and the latest date in his book falls 22 years later (570 B.C.). He thus appears as a somewhat younger contemporary of Jeremiah; and he was carrying on his prophetic work among the exiles already in Babylonia while Jeremiah was endeavouring to gain a hearing in the doomed city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel (ch. xviii) takes up the same proverb of the sour grapes, and, like Jeremiah, he asserts that Israel shall in the future have no occasion to use it, supporting his contention by a series of elaborately worked-out instances illustrative of the truth of the responsibility of the individual.

Religious individualism, then, at this stage, involves that the individual stands in such moral relationship to Yahweh that righteousness on his part must meet with its due reward, and iniquity with its due punishment. Still, however,

the view of man's relationship to his God appears sharply limited by the span of this present life. There is as yet no conception of its continuity into the unknown future. Thus, in order that Yahweh's moral dealing with man may justify itself under this conception, it follows that in this life righteousness must be observed to meet with reward, and wickedness with punishment. This is a theory which, like others which we have noticed, has a rough and general approximation to truth. Society being constituted as it is, it usually happens under normal conditions that moral and social rectitude meets with its recompense in this life. A life framed in accordance with God's moral laws is likely, on the whole, to be immune from the ills which attack the dissolute, and to be prolonged to old age; and commercial integrity and fair dealing between man and man must often, in the long run, command success. On the other hand, it happens normally that the sinner pays the penalty of his wickedness, it may be by disease and death brought on by a vicious career, by business failure, or by punishment at the hands of the law.

It was impossible, however, that such a theory should for long escape challenge. Glaring exceptions to the established rule were always likely to occur. More especially would this be the case at such a period as the fall of the Judean monarchy, the Exile in Babylon, and the Restoration, when upright and pious men formed a minority, often despised and sometimes perse-

cuted, when patriotic hopes kindled by the return from captivity were destined speedily to disappointment, and to the witness of "the day of small things" as against the expectations of a glorious future which had been kindled by the prophets. We find then that the problem of the undeserved suffering of the righteous and the unchecked prosperity of the wicked excited a large amount of speculation and religious difficulty at the period which we have now reached ; and it was out of this soil that the idea of personal immortality appears to have arisen, at times as an aspiration or merely tentative solution of the anomalies of the present life, at times as a dearly-prized conviction of individual hearts, but not yet as a definitely formulated dogma of religion.

It is impossible in this lecture to speak even cursorily of the Hebrew literature as a whole, which deals with the problem of suffering. In the book to which I have already referred I have attempted a fairly full survey. Now I must select ; and I choose the Psalms, as possessing by far the greatest importance for our present purpose. Here it is that the problem of suffering righteousness repeatedly presents itself in the mouths of poets speaking either for themselves as individuals, or as representatives of a class—the humble or afflicted ones. In the large majority of cases no attempt is made at a solution of undeserved suffering ; the Psalm takes the form of a prayer addressed to Yahweh, not a treatise

for the edification of suffering Israel. The conviction is often expressed that Yahweh will vindicate the cause of His servants in this life sooner or later, and will punish the cruelty and arrogance of the wicked.

“ If I had not trusted to behold the goodness of Yahweh in the
land of the living !——”

exclaims one Psalmist (xxvii. 13), breaking off in an aposiopesis.

“ For Thou hast delivered my soul from death,”

says another,

“ That I may walk before God in the light of the living.”

Psalm lvi. 13.

As for the wicked, the conviction is expressed that :—

“ Thou, Yahweh, shalt bring them down to the hole of the pit,
The men of bloodshed and guile shall not live out half their
days.”

Psalm lv. 23.

Two Psalms, xvi and xvii, end by expression of the writers' trust in Yahweh, in terms which have been thought to express conviction of a blessed future beyond the grave. Let us examine them.

Psalm xvi finishes with the words :—

“ I have set Yahweh before me continually,
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth
My flesh also shall dwell in security.
For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to She'ol,
Thou wilt not suffer Thy godly one to see the pit.

Thou makest me to know the path of life ;
 Fulness of joys is in Thy presence ;
 In Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Now though the Prayer Book Version of these words suggests almost irresistibly a reference to the life beyond the grave, and though it is most fitting that the words should be used, by Jews and Christians alike, in the fuller sense which further revelation has secured for them, yet it must, I think, be concluded, on examination of the terms used by the Psalmist, that it was not in his mind to formulate any definite belief as to a future life. The rendering of v. 9*b* in Prayer Book Version and Authorised Version, "My flesh also shall rest in hope," can scarcely fail to suggest a reference to the body lying in the grave in expectation of a future resurrection. Such an explanation is, however, scarcely possible. The Hebrew term בֶּשָׂרִי "my flesh" is elsewhere only employed of the *living* body ; and the Psalmist appears simply to be stating that, in his confidence in Yahweh's protection, he can live his life without fear of dangers which may assail him. Again, v. 10 must not be rendered, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in She'ol," but, as I have already given it, "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to She'ol," that is Yahweh will rescue his life from the imminent danger of physical death to which it is exposed. We may compare Psalm xxx. 3, where the same idea is expressed :

"Yahweh Thou hast brought up my soul from She'ol
 Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit."

I believe, however, that this Psalm, if it does not formulate any doctrine of immortality, at least strikes the key-note upon which the belief is based. "The path of life" which Yahweh makes known to His servant means life with God as distinct from mere earthly existence which man shares in common with the brute creation. In face of all that this means to him, and in the bliss of felt communion with his God, the poet seems, for the moment at least, to overlook the fact of death, and he is able to speak of the pleasures in Yahweh's right hand as enduring "for evermore."

The passage in Psalm xvii, which comes under consideration, is the last verse :—

"But as for me, in righteousness may I behold Thy face !
May I be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness !"

Here the interpretation turns on the sense which is to be attached to the expression "when I awake." It is natural for us, in our fuller light, to see in it an allusion to the awakening from death conceived as a sleep. But that such an idea was in the mind of the Psalmist must be considered doubtful. It may be that he is simply expressing the desire that morning by morning, as he awakes to the daily round, he may do so with a renewed sense of Yahweh's fatherly care. This is the sense which is supported by consideration of parallel passages. So we have Psalm iii, 5 :—

"I laid me down and slept ;
I awaked ; for Yahweh sustaineth me."

And again, another poet (Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18) says :—

“How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God !
How great is the sum of them !
If I should count them, they are more in number than the
sand :
When I awake, I am still with Thee.”

In the same way, Prov. vi. 22, in speaking of the value of a parent's teaching, remarks :—

“When thou walkest, it shall lead thee ;
When thou liest down, it shall watch over thee ;
And when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”

We may conclude, therefore, that it is too precarious to read any hope of immortality into the words “When I awake” of Psalm xvii. 15.

There are certain Psalms which definitely set themselves to unravel the problem of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. These call for examination.

In Psalm xxxvii the poet takes his stand upon the contention that the moral anomaly presented by the problem is merely temporary. The opening stanzas of the Psalm strike the key-note of the theme which is developed throughout :—

“Fret not thyself because of the ungodly,
Neither be thou envious of the workers of iniquity ;
For they shall soon be mown down like the grass,
And like the green herbage shall they fade.

“Trust in Yahweh, and do good,
Dwell in the land and follow after faithfulness ;
So shalt thou delight thyself in Yahweh,
And He shall grant thee the petitions of thy heart.

“Commit thy way unto Yahweh ;
And trust in Him, and He shall act.
And He shall bring forth as the light thy righteousness,
And thy just right as the noonday.”

In fact, the writer is so thoroughly convinced that the problem meets with its adequate solution in this life that he makes no exceptions to the rule of retributive justice. His experience, briefly stated, is :—

“I have been young, and now am old ;
Yet saw I never the righteous forsaken,
Nor his seed begging their bread.”

On the other hand :—

“I have seen the wicked like a terrible one,
And putting forth his strength like a spreading cedar :
But I passed by, and lo, he was not ;
When I sought him he could not be found.”

The conclusion is :—

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright,
For there is a posterity to the man of peace,
But transgressors shall be destroyed together ;
The posterity of the wicked shall be cut off.”

As we read the Psalm, we cannot help feeling that, when we have paid full tribute to the writer's strong religious faith, yet he must have been a man of extraordinary optimism, or have been placed in such a situation that he did not fully realize the anomalies of the present. In any case, the iron does not seem to have entered into his soul as it did into the souls of certain

other Psalmists ; consequently we look in vain for any hint that the unseen future beyond the grave may offer a solution which this earthly stage, taken by itself, is unable to afford.

We pass on to Psalm xlix, where the writer develops the same theme. His language and outlook are modelled upon that of the "Wisdom" literature of Israel, and present many parallels to the books of Proverbs and Job. At the outset he abandons the national standpoint, and proclaims himself a citizen of the world. His message is a philosophy of life which has universal application, and so he addresses it to humanity at large :—

"O hear this, all ye peoples ;
Give ear, all ye that dwell in the fleeting age ;
Both sons of mean man and sons of high man,
Rich and poor together."

He then propounds his "problem" or "enigma"—the prosperity of the worldly wicked :—

"They that trust in their wealth,
And boast themselves of the multitude of their riches."

The point which he emphasizes is that all this earthly prosperity is sharply terminated by death, and at this crisis it can avail a man nothing for the ransom of his life. However wide his acres may be, and however arrogantly he may give his name to his estate under the fond impression that it will belong to his posterity for ever, yet he himself can look forward to an estate

no wider than the grave, and to the cheerless prospect of She'ol :—

“ But surely no man can ransom himself,¹
 Or give to God the price of his life—
 For the ransom of their life is too costly,
 And one must let that alone for ever—
 That he should live on for ever—
 And not see the pit,
 For he seeth that wise men die,
 Together the self-confident and brutish perish,
 And leave their wealth for others.²
 Graves are their houses for ever,
 Their habitations to all generations,
 Even of them that called estates after their own names.
 For man in honour hath no abiding ;
 He is like the beasts which perish.”

In continuance, the lot of the wicked is contrasted with that of the righteous, in language which is somewhat obscure in detail, but of which the general drift seems to be clear.

“ This is the fate of them that are self-confident,
 And of those who following them approve their speech.
 Like a flock they are placed (ready) for She'ol ;
 Death is their shepherd ;
 And the upright have dominion over them in the morning ;
 And their form must She'ol consume, that there be no
 habitation for it.
 But surely God will ransom my life from the hand of She'ol ;
 For He will take me.”

Here again the question arises whether the

¹ Reading אֵין לֹא פִדְיָהּ יִפְדֶּה אִישׁ, in the place of the Hebrew text which is rendered in Revised Version “None (of them) can by any means redeem his brother.”

² Reading קִרְבָּנֵם in place of קִרְבָּנֵם “their inward part” (Revised Version “their inward thought”).

Psalmist is expressing his conviction of a blessed immortality for the righteous, or whether the final triumph of the righteous is conceived as taking place in this life, and so tacitly limited to it. The majority of scholars take the latter view; but personally, the more I examine the Psalm the more does the conviction force itself upon me that the writer has in view something more than the mere temporary recompense of the righteous during this earthly life. The interpretation turns largely upon the meaning which is given and the expression "in the morning," as describing the time at which the righteous are to "have domination" over the wicked, that is, to witness the vindication of their righteousness. The expression is thought by many to have merely temporal reference to the dawning of happier times for the upright after the destruction of the wicked, as described in Mal. iv. 1-3. Against the view, it seems to me that nowhere in the Psalm does the writer predict any sudden and overwhelming calamity as impending upon the wicked. Throughout, the point which he emphasises is that, however prosperous his life may be, yet death is bound to end all. Death is conceived as the inevitable which cannot be bought off with worldly riches; but the idea of death falling as a sudden and unexpected blow upon the ungodly is foreign to the whole conception; since the writer sets himself to propound facts of human experience which must be obvious to all who will think about them, and the view that the worldly

wicked are specially doomed to sudden visitation of death in the form of a dire calamity is not one of these. The view of death as the inevitable issue of life, uninfluenced by riches and worldly position, is rounded off by the refrain of v. 12 :—

“ For man in honour hath no abiding :
He is like the beasts which perish ; ”

and it is in the next section that the Psalmist passes beyond experience, and expresses the conviction of faith as to the future in store for the righteous. If, then, the wicked are to meet their retribution by no sudden blow, but simply by death as the end of all their pomp and circumstance, then it seems that the prediction of something different in store for the righteous *must* contain more than the expectation of their vindication in this life only. The striking definiteness of the expression “ in the morning ” almost inevitably suggests to us a reference to the Resurrection morning ; though, in our ignorance of the date of the Psalm and the background of belief which the writer had behind him, we can affirm nothing definite with regard to it. In v. 15, the statement :—

“ God shall ransom my soul from the hand of She’ol
For He *shall take me*, ”

recalls to mind the account of Enoch’s translation : “ He was not, *for God took him*, ” the same Hebrew verb being used in each case. If, as seems probable, the Psalmist is choosing his words with reference to this narrative, then the conclusion follows almost necessarily that he

is looking forward to a deliverance from She'ol which is more than temporary, and to a future which may be compared with the lot of the patriarch.

It was this same question of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous which exercised the mind of the writer of Psalm lxxiii, and at one time seemed likely to prove fatal to his belief in God's good providence. The poet tells us first of all how critical was the position of his faith for the time being :—

“ But as for me, my feet were almost gone ;
My steps had well-nigh slipped.
For I was envious of the arrogant,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

And then he goes on to set forth in some detail the position of these unrighteous men. To his imagination they seem to escape all the ills of life and to enjoy its good things, while all the time they laugh God to scorn. Bitterly, in conclusion, he contrasts their position with his own :—

“ Behold, these men are ungodly,
And, secure for ever, they have won great substance,
Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,
And washed my hands in innocence ;
And yet I was plagued all the day,
And my rebuke came every morning.”

But even in his misery it comes upon him that this is not the attitude which a member of the true Israel ought to adopt. Such hopeless abandonment is, in fact, a denial of his belief, a

proving false to the cause of which he stands as the representative :—

“ If I said, I will speak thus,
I should have been a traitor to the generation of Thy children.”

Therefore, when faith seems weakest, he determines to make the severest trial of faith. He takes his difficulty into the sanctuary of God, the place which was regarded as the seat of God's earthly government, the House of prayer in which devout men were wont to see Yahweh's power and glory, and so the right place to seek enlightenment at such a spiritual crisis. And it is here that a solution offers itself to his mind, and he meets with perfect satisfaction :—

“ And I kept thinking how to understand this ;
It was vain labour in my eyes :
Until I went into the sanctuary of God,
And gave heed unto their latter end.”

The explanation which suggests itself to the Psalmist and satisfies his mind is not unlike that which we have seen to be put forward by the author of Psalm xxxvii. The prosperity of the wicked is, after all, more apparent than real. There is a Nemesis waiting in their path. Even while they stretch out their eager hands to gather life's flowers, the solid rock gives way beneath their feet, and they go down quick into the abyss :—

“ Surely in slippery places dost Thou set them,
Thou castest them down into ruins ;
How are they become a desolation in a moment,
Swept off, consumed by terrors !

As a dream, when one has awakened,
 So Lord, when Thou arousest Thyself, Thou shalt
 despise their semblance.
 O, that my heart should be embittered,
 And indeed I should be pierced in my reins !
 I indeed was brutish and ignorant,
 I was like a beast before Thee."

The solution cannot be said to be final and altogether satisfactory. It represented a small advance in thought upon the old opinion ; but was in fact merely a partial and fragmentary contribution to the truth, and was destined soon to be merged in a larger view of God's dealings with men.

But this solution is not the Psalmist's real gain during his visit to the sanctuary. We find it rather in the conviction which seizes him of the great reality of his communion with God ; a conviction which calls forth from him such a confession of trust in God as forms perhaps the highest venture of faith contained in the pages of the Old Testament :—

" Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee ;
 Thou hast holden my right hand.
 According to Thy purpose wilt Thou lead me,
 And afterwards wilt take me gloriously.
 Whom have I in heaven ?
 And, having Thee, there is naught that I desire upon earth.
 Though my flesh and heart should have wasted away,
 God would be the Rock of my heart and my Portion
 for ever."

This passage, even more forcibly than the passage which we have already noticed in Psalm xvi. 11,

illustrates the position from which the doctrine of personal immortality is really developed, viz., a strength of conviction of the reality of personal union with God, under which the thought of death fades into the background and is ignored, the Psalmist feeling that he possesses all that he needs, and that, in any event, he is entirely in the hands and under the special care of his God.

Whether the Psalmist is definitely formulating his belief in a future life has been doubted; but at any rate in the statement of v. 24b, "and afterwards wilt take me with glory," the expression "afterwards" seems to be contrasted with what goes before—God's support and guidance during this present life; and again we notice the phrase "*wilt take me*," which, as in Psalm xlix. 15, recalls the story of Enoch—"he was not, for God took him."

Thus we conclude our examination of the Psalms. We have seen that they contain little or nothing which takes the shape of a definitely formulated belief in a life beyond the grave, in which the anomalies of the present life will be explained and set right; but, on the other hand, they illustrate—and that more forcibly than any other portion of the Old Testament—the height to which faith was capable of rising under the sense of communion with its God, and so they provide the fruitful soil out of which the doctrine of a personal immortality in the enjoyment of the society of God was bound sooner or later to be developed.

This conviction of a personal relation to God, independent of time and change, and not any particular theory as to the character of the life after death, is the lasting contribution of the Old Testament to the doctrine of a future life.

“MYSTIC CURRENTS IN ANCIENT
ISRAEL ”

BY THE VERY REV. THE CHIEF RABBI
(DR. J. H. HERTZ)

MYSTIC CURRENTS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

I

My Paper is entitled "Mystic Currents in Ancient Israel." Experience teaches that, as a preliminary to any useful discussion of such a theme as I have chosen, there must be agreement between lecturer and audience as to the meaning of the key-words "mystic" and "mysticism"—an understanding of the connotation of these terms, as well as some knowledge of the universality and varieties of the mystic experience. In the present instance, I must further justify the conjunction of two ideas that are held to be mutually exclusive; I mean "Jewish" and "mysticism." Otherwise, a discourse on mystic currents in Israel, ancient or modern, might be held to be as promising as an hour's discourse on Wolves in England. I shall, therefore, begin my introduction with an answer to the question:—What is mysticism?

Mysticism, like religion, is a word of many and indefinite meanings. During the greater part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mysticism was often used as a term of contempt, and the things it denotes were misunderstood and despised. Needless to say

that, such being the case, justice was done neither to the mystics nor to the place of mysticism in human life. For over a generation, however, there has been a marked reaction against the one-sidedness of those times that loved to style themselves Age of Reason and Age of Science. There is, to-day, in all Western countries a wide-spread interest in mysticism—an interest that has given rise to an extensive literature dealing with the history and psychology of mystics and mysticism. There are still some shallow rationalists who shake their heads in sorrow or in anger at the very sound of the word “mystic,” unless such mention be to point a warning or to adorn a condemnation. Quite otherwise is the attitude of the new and broader scholarship of the present day. It has analysed and investigated the mystic state of consciousness; and has studied the varieties of mystical experience among different races, faiths and cultures. The result has been an ever-clearer recognition that mysticism is a universal phenomenon, and is not confined to any one racial stock or single current of civilisation. We have discovered that it arises independently in the Orient and in the Occident, in Judaism, Christianity and Mahomedanism. Thus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, independent mystic movements arose almost contemporaneously in Moslem Persia (e.g., the astronomer and poet, Omar Khayyam, *d.* 1123); in Christian France (e.g., St. Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, *d.* 1153) and in Spanish Jewry

(e.g., Solomon ibn Gabirol, *d.* 1058; Azriel, *d.* 1238, and the forerunners of the Zohar, the sacred canon of the Jewish mystics). And what is as remarkable, we find parallel problems agitating the souls of men, and kindred solutions propounded, whether on the Ganges or on the Rhine, in Byzantium or in the Provence. Everywhere there are the same avenues and well-trodden paths for the mystic quest, and similar allegories to smoothen for the pilgrim the "mystic way"; and everywhere do we find the identical love-symbolism—ardent, sensuous, daring—as the language of the mystics. The close agreement which we find between mystics of all cultures and countries indicates that the mystical experience is a genuine part of human nature. Mystic truths, it is more and more seen, are as old as humanity, and their abiding survival in literature, life and religious institutions is fully recognised. A serious attempt is at last being made by our generation to conceive worthily of this mighty movement of the human spirit throughout the ages.

Alongside the perennial persistence of mystic phenomena is the recognition of their many-sidedness. No survey of these forces in any one period of history can now be considered adequate that does not take account of its devotional mystics, its speculative mystics and its "practical" mystics. Fundamentally they are all one, yet a clear differentiation is indispensable.

To begin with devotional mystics. Underlying all mysticism is the belief that there is a

kinship between God and man. In consequence, the human soul for ever reaches out in irrepressible yearning towards the all-pervading and all-in-dwelling Power who is our Father. Man's holiest aspiration, the mystics maintain, is the spiritual vision of the Divine ; and its attainment is that glowing, first-hand experience of the immediacy of God which brings the soul of man into loving and rapturous union with the Divine. The human soul, they tell us, *can* see God and live—nay, must see God truly to live. And, indeed, throughout the centuries, we have the testimony of men and women to whom this vision and communion have been granted. We need not go far afield into distant lands and literatures to learn the nature of such report. The record of what these men and women have seen and felt is amazingly similar. Blake, Wordsworth and Rossetti repeat the thoughts of the great mystics of former ages ; and all of them, ancient and modern, seem to re-echo the Psalmist's words : " With Thee is the fountain of life ; in Thy light do we see light." Only in God and through God, it is felt, can we find life and blessedness ; apart from Him there is nothing but misery and death.

And yet this feeling can neither be defined or communicated to those who lack the mystic sense. If in a blind world one man were suddenly endowed with a gift of sight, and he were to attempt, however falteringly, to convey the glory of the sunlight to his fellows, they would receive his words with incredulity, nay, with

ridicule. His only justification would be his own experience, confirmed by the testimony of those other rare witnesses who might similarly be blessed in their generation. The mystics therefore, can only exclaim : “ *O taste and see*, that the Lord is good.” He feels his soul invaded with a new life-giving energy, exalted with a new sense of power, and altogether flooded with joy. Almost invariably he bursts forth into song, hymn and adoration. The mystic sings ; and his are the great psalms, hymns and prayers of the ages.

So much for the devotional aspect of mysticism. All mystics are devotional, yet their aim is not merely communication with God, but insight into the nature of God. “ Make known unto me Thy ways, I beseech thee ; show me Thy glory,” they pray with Israel’s Lawgiver. After adoration come contemplation and speculation. What metaphysics attempts to construct by reason, speculative mysticism undertakes to solve by feeling, intuition, unbridled imagination, ecstasy. “ True mystic philosophy,” says Max Müller, “ it is as clear as the summer sky, full of brightness and warmth ; not dark things left dark, but dark things made bright and clear and intelligible.” All things emanated from God—it proclaims—and will in the end return to Him. The things of this world are shadow-shapes, fleeting forms and impermanent manifestations merely, of a Spirit living and abiding for evermore. God is the life of all worlds, and nature is full of God. Therefore, nothing in

the world can be trivial, there is a spark of holiness and divine beauty in everything. The aim of the true mystic is :—

“ To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower ;
To hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”

Every natural object apprehended by the senses is merely the husk of some deeper truth. All is but symbol here below.

A few words more on “ practical ” mystics, and our preliminary answer to the question : “ What is Mysticism ? ” will be at an end. Convinced, as the mystic is, that without holiness there can be no vision of, and no true fellowship with, God, he aims by sanctification to render himself worthy of admittance into the innermost halls of the Heavenly Palace. The mystic does not remain content with the knowledge of the potential God-likeness of man. The spark must be fanned into a flame. “ Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? And who shall stand in His holy place ? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.” Saints, sages and ascetics, have loved to conceive of life as a ladder, the whole duty of man as an ascent, and every day as a stepping-stone to higher things. The “ ladder of perfection ” may be scaled by the path of prayer and contemplation ; by the path of devout study of Scripture or of God’s handiwork in nature ; but above all else, by the path of the consecrated life, fighting temptations in the

great world of action. For mystics as a class have been men of action ; they have numbered among them the Akibas and the Cromwells, the Lurias and the Lincolns of mankind. Like the poets—who are the mystics of our latter-day—they can exclaim :—

“ We are the dreamers of dreams,
World-losers and world-forsakers ;
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.”

Mysticism, whether in the world of devotion, contemplation or aspiration, is thus religion in its most dynamic, living stage ; in its most concentrated and exclusive form. And as long as religion has the mystic glow, it is the aroma, the music of life. “ We have lost the mystical sense,” laments Amiel, that true child of the nineteenth century, “ and what is religion without mysticism ?—a rose without perfume.”

II

What of Jewish mysticism ? Take up any one of the general books on mysticism produced in recent decades, and you will search in vain for Jewish names. Their total silence would lead you to believe that Jews and Judaism have made no contribution to mystic lore or life. Some Jewish writers go much further. They deny the very possibility of a Jewish mystic. To them, the very words “ Jewish mysticism ” are a contradiction in terms. The absence of any mystic element—they proudly

maintain—is a thoroughly characteristic feature of purest Judaism. The ancient Jewish mind is averse to all mystery. The Torah is the heritage of the Congregation of Jacob; and the covenant at Sinai takes place amid thunder and lightning, and the sound of the Shofar. Israel's revelation, we are told, is the great anti-mystical demonstration and democratisation of religion. No greater contrast to the simplicity and universality of the Hebrew Scriptures could be conceived than an occult teaching given to a few elect. We are, furthermore, referred to the Lawgiver's words: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God"; or to the Psalmist, who in Psalm cxxxi sang: "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty. Neither do I exercise myself in things too great, or in things too wonderful for me. Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul"—as containing the keynote of the Jewish spirit in these things.

But the mere fact that Moses drew that distinction between secret things which belong to God, and the revealed things; the mere fact that the Psalmist had to still and quiet his soul like a weaned child with his mother—famished for the milk of divine mystery, the things which are too great and too wonderful for him and are denied him—proves the prevalence of the search for the secret things. Though eminent Jewish scholars have been among the loudest in asserting the absence of mysticism in Israel, this view is a survival of early nineteenth century rationalism and will be seen to be as untrue to the data of

history as it is an unjustifiable narrowing of the term mysticism.

Christian theologians, as a rule, succeed in being even more misleading on this subject. The Jewish mind, they tell us, did not lend itself to mysticism because of its rigid monotheism, and its turn towards worldly realism. Mysticism, moreover, instinctively recedes from statutory observances as well as from all formulae that have become stereotyped and mechanical. Why, therefore, look to Jewry for mysticism? Everyone is naturally a mystic or a legalist, Dean Inge tells us. And as the Jew is by nature a legalist, he cannot, it is triumphantly declared, be a mystic.

Now, Christian scholars on Jewish questions have at times been exceedingly clever; but owing to their imperfect acquaintance, and still more imperfect sympathies, with the subject, they are apt to see things in a false perspective, and to build far-fetched hypotheses on flimsiest foundations. Many of them, especially among Continental theologians, proceed on the principle that one may say anything of Jews and Judaism so long as it makes them ridiculous. There is method in their malice. Their sweeping generalisations are calculated to deny religious feeling to the Jew, or religious worth to Judaism. Thus, the hostile statement that rigid monotheism is incompatible with mysticism, is simply an amplification of Paul de Lagarde's sneer that Jewish monotheism is neither ethical nor spiritual, but merely arithmetical. But think of the

Psalmist's passionate cry: "For Thy Name are we slaughtered all the day;" or of the lines of the mediaeval hymn-writer who witnessed the pogroms of the Crusaders:—

"Yes, they slay us and they smite,
Vex our souls with sore affright;
All the closer cleave we, Lord,
To Thine everlasting word.
Though they curse, and bind and kill,
The living God is with us still.
The fair and young lie down to die
In witness of Thy unity;
From dying lips the accents swell,
'Thy God is One, O Israel.'"

In face of such infinite devotion must one not ask in wonderment: Would Israel have been ready in all centuries to agonise and die merely—for the multiplication table? And as a matter of fact, the history of mysticism in no way corroborates the contention that rigid monotheism must, of necessity, be un-mystical. Nothing can be more rigid than Moslem monotheism; yet what an array of mystical sects and schools, poets and thinkers, Islam has produced.

Equally false is the antithesis of mystic and legalist.

"The view which regards the mystic as a spiritual anarchist," says Evelyn Underhill, "receives little support from History. When we examine the lives and works of mystics, what do we usually find? We usually find that in spite of the intensely individualistic type of their religion, the great mystics are faithful sons of some great institutional religion. Their mystical experiences are coloured and moulded by some one dominant faith. And indeed this interweaving of the formalism

of tradition with the mysticism of the individual, is an arresting feature of mystical theology in all ages. Plotinus even adapted—though with what difficulty—the relics of paganism to his doctrine of the Real. Catholicism has been a greater nursery of mystics than Protestantism.”

No wonder that within Judaism we find a similar consistent and successful blending of legalism and spirituality. Thus Pinchas ben Yair, the greatest rigorist among the Mishnic rabbis, is the author of the mystical ladder of perfection. “Cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to godliness; godliness leads to humility; humility leads to saintliness; saintliness leads to the gift of Holy Spirit and Immortality.” Joseph Caro, the legist *par excellence*, the author of the final authoritative code of rabbinic law, the Shulchan Aruch, is a whole-hearted devotee of Cabala.

Any one who sympathetically follows the story of Jewish mysticism will see that nowhere have there been more ardent yearnings for full and rapturous communion with the Infinite and Eternal than in the Synagogue, resounding with Israel’s continuous cry for God extending over 2,500 years.

Again, in the realm of speculation, nowhere have there been mightier longings after the Unseen, a stronger revolt against the limitations of sense and time, or a bolder attempt to realise in thought and feeling the immanence of the eternal in the temporal, than in Jewry.

And all this yearning was not confined to the realm of adoration or philosophical theory. In

every generation there have been saintly Jewish souls who made it their life's task to be transformed into the likeness of Him in whose image they were created. The *Imitatio Dei* was held forth as the whole duty of the Jewish mystic. Past and present disappear for him in a transfigured future. He finds new dimensions in the Scriptures; thereby computes Messianic times and seasons; and often essays to force the hands of Providence. "He that hath faith does not hasten." Not so he that hath certainty; for he labours not for himself alone. He seeks the true way of redemption for Israel, nay for all humanity.

My long introduction to the theme of my lecture is at an end. It has not been altogether without some sidelights on the mystic attitude of the ancient Jewish spirit. We shall now proceed to the Bible itself; and, in a brief survey, indicate the mystic currents in the Law, the Prophets and the Sacred Writings.

III.

The Bible is the world's greatest classic of mysticism. It is the depository of humanity's deepest mystic feeling, unsurpassed and unequalled. Furthermore, in one or another of the canonical books we shall find the *starting point* and *beginnings* of every form of Jewish mysticism—devotional, speculative, and practical. It is necessary to emphasise the obvious, when

for generations the obvious has been strenuously denied.

On the very first page of the Torah, the Spirit of God hovers above the primeval waters of Creation; and man is declared created in the image of God. God is in man, but God is greater than man. It is the divinity of humanity that the Torah emphasises, not the humanity of divinity; for the picturing of God in human form is held to be as idolatrous as in any material form. It proclaims the kinship of God with man, not man's identity with God. The child can be father to others, but never to the parent.

The great commandment of the Torah is: "Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might." And the commandment of God is within: "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, 'Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it.' But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

In the course of centuries, the Law itself becomes the object of passionate love and self-sacrificing devotion. Remember the 119th Psalm, with its:—

"Oh, how I love Thy law!
It is my meditation all the day."

"Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage."

“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold
Wondrous things out of Thy law.”

“I have longed for Thy salvation, O Lord,
And Thy law is my delight.”

“Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever ;
“For they are the rejoicing of my heart.”

Or, the following from the Daily Prayer Book,
also a product of ancient Israel :—

“With everlasting love Thou hast loved the house of Israel,
Thy people ; a Law and commandments, statutes and judgments hast Thou taught us. Therefore, O Lord our God,
when we lie down and when we rise up we will meditate on
Thy statutes ; yea, we will rejoice in the words of Thy law
and in Thy commandments for ever ; for they are our life and
the length of our days, and we will meditate on them day and
night.”

The mightiest mystic current in Israel, however, is, undoubtedly, Prophecy ; and the whole psychology of ecstasy is to be found in the experience of the Prophets. Nowhere else are we to the same extent face to face with first-hand living religion.

The consciousness that the Prophets had as pre-ordained instruments of the Divine Will (“Before I formed thee, I knew thee ; and before ever thou wert born, I sanctified thee and appointed thee a prophet unto the nations,” is the Divine word to Jeremiah) ; their fearless proclamation of a *Dies Irae* against all the wickedness and injustice in the world ; their conception of Righteousness as an irresistible cosmic force ; their glad tidings that what ought to be *can* be, and *will* be—proves them practical mystics in the

fullest and holiest sense of that term. To Isaiah, God is the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity and the heart of him who is humble and of contrite spirit; and his fellow-prophets boldly figure the relationship of God to His people under the tenderest images. Father, brother, friend, shepherd, guide, are common titles. In Hosea, God speaks of Israel at one time under the simile of the bride, and at another time as the newly-wedded wife. Consider the implications of such similes as bride, newly-wedded wife when applied to the human soul in its relation to the Divine Source of all things. The human soul must have recourse to Him, not merely as a friend in need, under the strain of duty, the battering of affliction or the failure of sympathy; it must press forward towards Him even when there is no need, must love to pour out its thoughts for the pleasure of pouring them out, must breathe unto God its most secret sorrows, hopes, complaints, wishes in unheard whispers—implying that only fullest trust and unconditional surrender suffice for religion. No wonder that the Song of Solomon, conceived as a love-dialogue between God and Israel, or between the Almighty and the human soul, became a fountain of exalted emotion and mystic imagery for all generations within and without the Synagogue. "If the Sacred Writings are holy, then is the Song of Solomon holiest among the holy," exclaimed Rabbi Akiba, when there were doubts as to the admission of this book into the Sacred Collection. Writers on mysticism as far

apart as Adolph Jellinek and Dean Inge may tell us that the effects of the inclusion of the Song of Solomon in the Canon was wholly bad ; but they forget that love is the universal and perennial language of mysticism, and is found among the Indian and Sufi mystics, who had never known the Song of Songs which is Solomon's.

We now come to the Psalms, the Bible within the Bible. It is impossible to find in the world's literature a more striking expression of the yearning of the soul towards its Creator than in the Psalms :—

“ As the hart panteth after the water-brooks,
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.
Whom have I in heaven but Thee,
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth :
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion for
ever.”

Man yearns for God ; and God yearns for man's prayer. He is “ the Holy One enthroned upon the praises of Israel.” The Psalmist lives and moves in the presence of God. “ I must set the Lord before me continually, O God. Thy loving-kindness is better than life.” Not only is the Lord our light and our salvation, says the Psalmist, but He is our home. “ O Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world,

even from everlasting to everalsting Thou art God."

All nature, to the Psalmist, proclaims the Divine. In a literal translation, the 19th Psalm reads : "The heavens are for ever declaring the glory of God, and the firmament is for ever showing forth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night revealeth knowledge." Even those aspects of the Divine Nature which are common to all theistic faiths, like God's omniscience and His omnipresence, are expressed in the Psalms with a vivid simplicity and power that will always appeal to the heart of man. "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. For while there is not yet a word on my tongue, lo, Thou, O Lord, knowest it all." Or translated into modern speech :

"The rose, whose beauty glads thine eyes to see,
Blossomed in God ere time began to be."

The Psalmist does not represent in Judaism, as do the Sufis in Islam, an alien type of religion. He lives among his brethren ; and his words, which are the free but fervent expression of natural feeling, are the articulate expression of the *national soul* from Davidic times and before, to a period posterior to the Babylonian Exile ; and, according to some moderns, to the Macabbean age. If, as Christian theologians never tire of repeating, Judaism had taught a distant God, eighteen centuries of Christian piety would not have used this Jewish hymn-book

of the Temple as the incommensurable medium for religious edification.

But we must not forget that the Bible was also the basis of speculative mysticism in Israel, no less than of devotion or aspiration. The two foci round which the ellipse of mystic speculation turned for nearly 1,500 years were the first chapter of Genesis and the first chapter of Ezekiel. Speculation centring round the first chapter of Genesis was called *Maaseh Bereshith*, and dealt with the problems of Creation and Nature's mysteries. Whereas Ezekiel's glimpse of the Heavenly Chariot and Isaiah's theophany of the Heavenly Throne with winged Cherubim surrounding it, chanting "Holy, Holy, Holy, full is the whole earth of His glory," opened a wide field for the Jewish mystic. This was called *Maaseh Merkabah*, and busied itself with the Divine Nature, the essence, attributes and names of the Godhead.

The conception of Wisdom as the instrument of God in creation may be said to open *Maaseh Bereshith* speculation. In Proverbs, chap. viii, verses 22-31, Wisdom sings:—

“ The Lord formed me as the beginning of His way,
The first of His works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,
Or ever the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth ;
When there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills was I brought forth ;
While as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields,
Nor the beginning of the dust of the world.

When He established the heavens, I was there :
When He set a circle upon the face of the deep :
When He made firm the skies above :
When the fountains of the deep showed their might :
When He gave to the sea its bound,
That the waters should not transgress His command-
ment :
When He appointed the foundations of the earth :
Then I was by Him, as a nursling ;
And I was daily all delight, playing always before Him,
Playing in His habitable earth,
And my delights are with the sons of men."

This conception became a far-reaching influence in the later heretical as well as the orthodox thinkers both in the Synagogue and in the Church. Wisdom is here personified as a being that possesses the moral qualities of God without His self-determination. She is in fellowship with God, co-eval with the beginning of divine activity and anterior to the physical world. She presided over the birth of Nature. But though her sportive path can still be traced in the processes of Nature, her highest flight is in the regeneration of the moral life of humanity. Wisdom in the Bible is thus not "pure knowledge." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is the faculty to differentiate between good and evil that enables man to stand in close relationship with God. In Job, wisdom is represented as identical with Righteousness.

"Where shall wisdom be found ?
And where is the place of understanding ?
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ;
And to depart from evil is understanding."

IV.

We have now followed the currents of mystic thought and feeling in Prophecy, the Wisdom Literature and the great hymn-writers of Israel. One more book we shall touch upon, and that is the Book of Daniel. This book, with its pictures of guardian angels and the river of fire and the "Ancient of Days"; its Messianic calculations of the End and its enunciation of the doctrine of immortality—became the model of an entire literature, the Apocalyptic literature. The importance of this literature has of late been tremendously over-estimated by Charles and Continental scholars generally. Be that as it may, books like Enoch, Jubilees, the Apocalypses of Baruch and Second Ezra, though far inferior to Daniel in simplicity and dignity and freedom from extravagant conceptions, throw an unexpected additional light on many phases of Jewish thought and life in the centuries before and after the destruction of the Temple.

We can only glance at the largest and most important of these apocalyptical writings, the Book of Enoch. It is not a single book, but a collection of writings in the name of that early patriarch, of whom Scripture records that he "walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." Except to the professional scholar, Enoch is both a bewildering and an inexpressibly wearisome book. To the student of Jewish mysticism, however, it is the first treatise in *Maaseh Bereshith*,

“ an attempt to see the world steadily and to see it whole; to unify the physical world, the moral world and the political world ”—a veritable store-house of Jewish folk-lore on the wonders and secrets of Nature and the spirit-world; on the fall of the angels and their punishment, on rebellious stars and the Messianic age; on Enoch’s journeys through the secret places of the earth and heaven; on his dreams, visions and similitudes; on the origin of the arts, crafts and sciences, and their pernicious influence on the moral state of man. There is in it very little of mysticism in the sense of adoration. Its lasting interest as well as of the other Apocalyptic books, is in the unshakeable faith of their authors in Divine Judgment. They had an unconquerable belief in the real dominion of the unseen world over the world of sense, and uncompromisingly maintained the cause of goodness in the face of victorious evil. With the author of the Book of Daniel, they were the first to grasp the unity of history. Kingdoms come and kingdoms go, but God remains forever. His Kingdom will come at length, though tyranny and inequity now rule. “ Enoch’s guiding star ” says Dr. Burkitt, “ is a belief that the confused drama of history is not without a purpose, and that in the end the Judge of all the earth can and will do right.” These writings must have been common even in the pre-Maccabean generations. Otherwise the words of Ben-Sira, written in 200 B.C., warning the reader, “ Search not the things that are too wonderful for thee, and thou

hast no business with the secret things," would be quite unintelligible. Ben Sira's view ultimately prevailed in Jewry. With the single exception of the book of Daniel, all these Apocalyptic books vanished from the memory of the Jewish people—only very small fragments of this literature reappearing on the surface of the Jewish consciousness centuries later in the Gaonic period.

With the Apocalypses some might think that we have passed beyond the limit I set to myself in the title "Mystic Currents in Ancient Israel." "Ancient Israel" cannot, however, be said to be over before the Bible itself was closed, i.e., before the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was complete. And that was certainly not the case at the time of the destruction of the Temple or even at the death of Akiba. We are, therefore, strictly within the time-limit of this lecture if we conclude with a brief survey of the Essenes as well as of the mystic currents which centre round Philo of Alexandria and Johanan ben Zakkai of Jerusalem and Jabneh.

Long before the rise of the Apocalyptic writers, there existed in Judea the strangest of sects—the Essenes. They are the great enigma of Jewish history; and though the literature on the Essenes is immense, we must still say, with Z. Frankel: "Hier ist alles dunkel." The most far-fetched explanations have been given of their name; and they have been traced to Pythagorean, Egyptian and even Bhuddistic sources. Essenism, however, is beyond question a purely Jewish phenomenon and the product of Palestinian

Judaism. The Essenes are the Pharisees of the Pharisees, aspiring as a community to the highest degree of Levitical purity. They numbered a little over 4,000 souls, utterly despising riches, worldly fame and pleasure, and practising a rare benevolence to one another and to mankind in general. They are a mystic brotherhood with quaint semi-ascetic customs, silent common meals and white robes; with lustrations and prayers; jealously guarding their mystic writings concerning the world of angels and esoteric beliefs. They seem to have lived on the borderland of ecstasy; and they so arranged their morning prayer as to finish the Shema when the sun came out in radiance. This is one of the reasons that led Rapaport to ascribe to them some of the most beautiful portions of the Prayer Book, e.g., the Sabbath-morning Hymn,

“ God, the Lord over all works, blessed be He,
And ever to be blessed by the mouth of everything that
hath breath.

His greatness and goodness fill the universe;
Knowledge and understanding surround Him;
He is exalted above the holy Chayoth,
And is adorned in glory above the celestial chariot;
Purity and rectitude are before His throne,
Lovingkindness and tender mercy before His glory.
The luminaries are good which our God hath created;
He formed them with knowledge, understanding and
discernment;
He gave them might and power to rule in the midst of the
world.

They are full of lustre and they radiate brightness.
Beautiful is their lustre through all the world.
They rejoice in their going forth, and are glad in their
returning.

They perform with awe the will of their Master.
Glory and honour they render unto His Name.
Exultation and rejoicing at the remembrance of His
sovereignty."

Philo, their contemporary, tells us :—

"Philosophical speculation they regard as too lofty for human nature and so they leave it to high-flying theorists, excepting that part of it which includes the study of God's existence (i.e. Maaseh Merkabah) and the formation of the Universe (i.e., Maase Bereshith). They pay especial attention to ethical study, using as their guide the laws which their fathers inherited. Herein they instruct themselves at all times, but more especially on the Seventh Day in the Synagogue. One reads aloud the Sacred Books, whereupon another of their most experienced members comes forward to explain whatever is not clear; for the greater part of their lore is conveyed figuratively (i.e., allegorically) after their time-honoured fashion."

Their life seems to have evoked to an unusual degree the admiration of all. Pliny calls them the marvel of the world. They seem to have brought the virtue of integrity, both of speech and action, to as high a point as can be reached by human beings. In the sphere of social ethics, they were the first to condemn slavery as an impious violation of the natural brotherhood of men.

A brotherhood remarkably similar to the Essenes, but far more monastic and contemplative, was found in Egypt under the name of the Therapeutai, who devoted their entire life to prayer and meditation on sacred things. Philo has left us an eye-witness' account of these Hellenistic Essenes. Of immeasurably greater

importance, however, is the Jewish spiritual life in the then capital of the intellectual world, Alexandria, seething with speculation and schools, and combining the wisdom and folly of the ages. In that world-city where Jew and Greek first met, where the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into a European tongue, the allegorical explanation of the Bible is predominantly employed to reconcile the Jewish heritage with Greek philosophy. The letter of the Law and the Law itself, nay the very heroes of Hebrew history, were considered as a mere husk of the mystery behind them all. This allegorizing movement culminates in Philo of Alexandria (born 25 B.C. and died 41 A.C.E.), one of the beautiful souls in the annals of Jewry. He is a loyal son of Israel. The Patriarchs are to him the living symbols of Divine Virtues; and Israel, because the descendants of these exemplars, form the aristocracy of mankind. He is the literary apologist of Judaism in the Hellenistic world; and in his old age he proceeds to Rome on a mission to the deranged Caligula in defence of his people. Yet he is thoroughly Hellenised. His heart and soul may be Jewish, but his mind and method are Greek.

We can but give the central thought of Philo's system. He formulates an eternal contrast between God and the world, between matter and spirit. The world of matter is to him the world of imperfection, impurity and sin. There is, therefore, an infinite abyss between God, the all-holy and all-good, and the world

of matter. Philo bridges this abyss by postulating mediating divine attributes and powers—creative ideas and angels—between God and the world. Chief among these intermediary beings and in a sense embracing them all, is the Logos, i.e., Mind, Thought, the Word—and this, and not the all-pure and all-holy God, is the Creator of the world of matter and imperfection. The Logos is a wavering, changing light in Philo; a mixture of many conceptions, and yet not incapable of being clearly apprehended. The author of the eighth chapter of Proverbs, and other writers before Philo's day had declared that God created the Universe by Wisdom, *Chochma*, *Sophia*. Instead of *Sophia*, Philo says Logos; viz., by Thought God created the world. One other example. We speak of conscience as the Voice of God within us. Philo calls it Logos, i.e., God's Reason within us, 'the divine ambassador in the soul, so illuminating its actions that their real value cannot escape detection.' These words of Philo, it is claimed, are the first definition ever given of Conscience.

Whenever Philo speaks of God, his language is that of ecstasy and hymn. 'To abide in God is man's highest blessedness'—he exclaims. I can cite only one brief quotation, which will, incidentally, illustrate his allegorical manner of expounding Scripture. Starting from Genesis xii.1 ('The Lord said unto Abraham, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee'"), Philo exclaims: "If any

desire come over thee, O soul, to inherit Divine bliss, then abandon not only thy 'land,' the body, and thy 'kinsmen,' the senses, and thy 'father's house,' the understanding, but flee from thyself and depart out of thyself, like men possessed in a rapt frenzy of prophetic inspiration. For when the mind is in a state of ecstasy, and no longer under its own control, it is drawn up towards God, and truth is its leader and clears a path before its feet, so that it may go forth upon the highway to become the heir of things Divine."

Epoch-making and lasting though Philo's influence has been in Christianity (he has been called the first of the Church Fathers) and in ancient Philosophy (from him to Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, is a straight line), Philo has left practically no trace in the Jewish life and culture of succeeding centuries. It is possible that the strange conception of *Metatron* in the Talmudic Haggadah is Philonic; and also that by some means — possibly Karaite — his wonderful anticipation of the larger lines in which the later Cabala developed, was transmitted to the Middle Ages. But the fact is that for over 1,000 years his very name disappeared from the memory of Israel. And no wonder. The Rabbis, too, had their speculations on the nature of the God-head; hypostases, like *Shekinah*, or like *Memra*, the directive Word of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind. These were fluid, semi-poetical conceptions devised to remove anthropomorphic expressions. Philo's "Memra," however, paved the way for Christian

dogmas, which weakened, nay destroyed, the monotheistic idea. In his exegesis, moreover, the whole of the Scripture narrative becomes a didactic poem, and vanishes in a mist of philosophical images. Even basic institutions of Jewish life dissolve into dim abstractions, leaving the Jew nothing to live by and nothing worth dying for.

Quite other is the Palestinian Judaism of that day. It survives the shocks of time, because it is based on the *terra firma* of Torah and historical fact. The leading representative of this Jewish Judaism we take to be a younger contemporary of Philo, Johanan b. Zakkai, the rescuer of Judaism from the shipwreck of Roman destruction in the year 70. Like Philo, Johanan was master in Creation and Merkabah mysteries. Listen to the following Talmudic tradition concerning the acquaintance of Johanan and his circle with these mysteries :—

“ R. Eleazar b. 'Arak was riding on a mule behind R. Johanan, when Eleazar began to tell what he had learned of the secrets of Merkabah. R. Johanan immediately descended from the mule and sat upon the rock. ‘Why, O Master, dost thou descend from the mule?’ asked the disciple. ‘Can I remain mounted upon the mule when the telling of the secrets of the Merkabah causes the Shekinah to dwell with us and the angels to accompany us,’ was the answer. Eleazar continued, and, behold, fire descended from heaven and lit up the trees of the field, causing them to sing anthems; and an angel cried out, ‘Truly these are the secrets of the Merkabah.’ Whereupon R. Johanan kissed Eleazar upon the forehead, saying: ‘Blessed be thou, O father Abraham, that hast a descendant like Eleazar b. 'Arak.’ Subsequently two other disciples of R. Johanan b. Zakkai, walking together, said to each other, ‘Let us also

talk together about the Maaseh Merkabah.' And no sooner did R. Joshua begin speaking, than a rain-bow like appearance (Ezek. i. 28) was seen upon the thick clouds which covered the sky, and angels came to listen as men do to hear wedding music."

Translate this into Aramaic and it reads like a page from the Zohar. It reveals in a dazzling way how the men who lived in those times that tried men's souls, loved to brood over esoteric doctrines, over the hidden grounds of the commandments, the "last things," and the Judgment Day. In later times, owing to the rise of Gnostic heresies, and the aberrations of Jewish-Christian sectaries within the Jewish camp, the Mishna was to decree: "Men are not to expound Creation Mysteries with two, nor Merkabah with one. Every one who meddles with the following four things, it were better for him had he not come into the world; viz., what is above and what is beneath, what is before and what is after."

Johanan's younger contemporary, Akiba, who had returned safe and sound from his wanderings in the jungle of Gnosticism, busied himself with what we might call God's "architect's plans" in the creation of Man and the Universe. "Beloved is man"—he taught—"for he was created in the image of God, and he *knows* that he is created in the image of God. Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of God; unto whom was given the desirable instrument through which the world was created," i.e., Torah, identified with creative Wisdom, *Memra*, *Logos*. Alongside of Bar Cocheba, Akiba was the leading spirit

in the last Jewish War of Independence in the year 132; and he sealed his devotion to his Faith and his People with his life. He defied the tortures of the executioner; and declared that utmost happiness was at last his, because at that moment he could give supreme proof that he loved his God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might. He triumphantly read the *Shema*, expiring with the word **אֶחָד** on his lips. With this scene of mystic exaltation before our eyes, of the great rabbi, warrior, martyr—a scene so characteristic of Israel's sufferings throughout the ages—I close my survey of mystic currents in ancient Israel.

THE END

